

"THIS BOOK SUCKS. READ IT!" **NICK CAVE**

NOBODY KNOWS WHAT THEY'RE DOING

THE 10 SECRETS ALL ARTISTS SHOULD KNOW

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SHOULD KNOW

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**FOR ALL THE KIDS
IN SMALL TOWNS WHO
DREAM OF BEING ARTISTS
(OR DINOSAURS)**

INTRO 

**TEN THINGS
NOBODY ELSE WILL**

TELL YOU

I started writing this book a long time ago, when I decided to start freelancing. I did what most people do when they go it alone. I read a lot of books, listened to a lot of talks, and asked a lot of questions. I looked for information, and I hoped to find help.

I found a few small crumbs of wisdom here and there, but actual advice was strangely hard to come by—and the more I looked, the less I found. The more specific my questions were, the more vague the answers became. A lot of the creative advice I found was superficial. If I scratched a little at the shiny veneer, inside was hollow. I began to wonder why all the useful things, the things that I actually needed to hear, were not being said. It began to feel like those things could be powerful secrets.

I later realized that there are obviously no powerful secrets. The reason nobody was, or still is, saying those things is a simple one. They often don't sound exciting or inspirational, so they don't sell. Advice, like most things in life, puts profit and popularity above everything else.

Advice only tells us what we want to hear, rather than what we need to. We want to know how to blow up on social media, not build a lasting career. We want to hear quick-fix secrets, not real-world direction. We want foolproof hacks for success, not the cold hard truth.

It's not entirely our fault that we have been conditioned to think and feel this way. We have been trained to connect with skin-deep aphorisms and turn away from heartfelt truths. We have been encouraged to dream big and stop sweating the small stuff. We have been urged to throw out anything that doesn't spark joy deep within us. We have been bombarded with claims that we don't need things like that in our lives anymore. But we do.

This type of advice could actually help us. By stripping away all of the things—and there are many—that feel like barriers to a creative career. By offering us inspiration and encouragement, above all else. By letting us know that any of us can make it as an artist, no matter what. Instead, it has led to us being mollycoddled and duped.

We have been told too many times that all we have to do is turn up, and everything else will easily fall into place, but it won't. Now, more than ever, we need to listen again to all the advice that doesn't make a profit. We need to read between the lines and look past the slogans.

I'm going to tell you some of those unsaid things in this book. If you're used to the

shiny optimism of being told to Do What You Love, or the hollow positivity of living Good Vibes Only, it may be a tough read. It is not that. But I want you to finish this book with more things that can help you than things you can share on Instagram.

I have no quick fixes, life hacks, or foolproof routines that will guarantee success. I have no idea how you become an instafamous influencer. I have no plan to guarantee you can get a book deal. All I have, and all I know, are ten things—ten things nobody else will tell you.



1

YOU SUCK!

WE ALL SUCK!

You have probably already realized why nobody else will tell you the things that I am going to. Telling you that you suck is not the best way to start a book, but I'm sorry to confirm that it's true. You suck compared with your peers, compared with everyone you love, and especially compared with your future self.

The good news is they all suck, too, or will, eventually. Everyone sucks. Even your future self will one day suck in comparison to your future-future self.

At some point in the future you will look back at the work you're making right now—some, maybe even all of it—and think that it's garbage. It might not happen for a few months, or even a few years. It might happen in just a few minutes. But one thing is certain, it will happen, and none of your work will be immune to this thought.

Even the most amazing and wonderful piece of art you have ever created could, and probably will, in time be reduced to one single thought: “Ugh, this sucks.”

That may sound deflating and depressing but it can and should be a wonderful realization. It means that you no longer have to worry about being amazing all the time, or even at all. You know that you *are* going to make bad work from time to time, and it genuinely doesn't matter.

ART VS #CONTENT

Artists face an ever-increasing pressure to be consistent content creators. Content is art, obviously, but content is also very different. Content must be authentic, shareable, current, funny, clever, well-executed, relatable, self-deprecating (but without wallowing in self-pity), and of course a wonderful piece of finished artwork.

I could tell you to simply not let yourself be sucked into that pressure. I could tell you that it is often imagined and self-inflicted, that you can even choose to remove yourself from it. But who am I kidding? If you want to be an artist today who earns a living, and isn't forgotten, making art is rarely enough. You also have to share it.

**YOU HAVE TO
BE SEEN AND
YOU HAVE TO
STAND OUT**

But (and that's a very big but), you don't have to obey The Rules of Social Media for Artists. Those rules are nothing more than shots in the dark. They are completely made up, often by people who know no more than you about becoming a social media star. In fact, artists who do have large social media followings rarely know how those followers found them. In almost every instance they were simply sharing work they loved to make, and one day something unknowable clicked.

Certain rules *can* definitely help you be more productive. Forcing yourself to post something creative every day *can* help you to build momentum, and to figure out your style. But those rules only work if they work for you.

Even if it feels like the opposite is true, you don't *have* to consistently churn out work daily, and each piece doesn't *have* to be better than the last. You don't have to only share work that is finished and shiny. You don't have to spend hours stylizing a photo of your morning coffee and sketchbook, just to prove you're still alive.

It's okay if you don't post every day, regardless of whether you have anything you actually want to share. It's okay if you post more photos of pizza than works of art. It's okay to make up your own social media rules entirely, and then break those rules as often as you like.

The truth is that social media numbers don't matter all that much in general. Those numbers can and will obviously help you get noticed, maybe even help you find work and commissions. But they are not as important as we're led to believe. At least, they don't equal automatic success. They are not a reliable or healthy way to measure your work, your worth, or anything else for that matter.

The only thing that *will* always matter, is the work you actually make. As social networks rise and fall, your work will be the one constant, as long as you keep making it.

**TO MAKE YOUR BEST WORK, YOU MUST FORGET ABOUT
THE LIKES, AND THE FOLLOWERS, AND THE ALGORITHMS.**

RELEASING THE PRESSURE

We all know that social media is not an accurate or realistic representation of reality. Even “Instagram vs reality” posts are created and curated specifically to be shared on Instagram, and to provoke some kind of reaction. But although you know this is true, your brain struggles to allow you to genuinely feel that truth.

In a 2017 New York Times article titled “How Evil Is Tech?” the columnist David Brooks wrote: “Tech companies understand what causes dopamine surges in the brain and they lace their products with ‘hijacking techniques’ that lure us in and create ‘compulsion loops.’”

Those compulsion loops are supposedly positive. You post, get a reward (likes), and feel compelled to post again. They are designed to keep feeding you dopamine through positive reinforcement, to keep your attention for as long as possible. In a world of limitless information, our attention has become invaluable. This is the attention economy in action. The problem is compulsion loops thrive even more on negative reinforcement.

**PAY MORE
ATTENTION
(TO LESS THINGS)**

For example, as you scroll through the feed of another—possibly more successful—artist you can feel inferior and inadequate. You experience negative reinforcement, rather than positive. But the compulsion loop still kicks in. It can become impossible for you to stop scrolling, looking, and comparing yourself. Multiply that by the hundreds or thousands of artists you follow, and those compulsion loops can become a downward spiral.

Those spiralling reminders of all the better people and all the better work can chip away at your confidence, little by little, until there is nothing left. Until you reach the stage where it feels easier to stop making work altogether, rather than destroy yourself over and over again.

Reminding yourself that you suck can help you through this. Reminding yourself that it doesn't matter if you make a piece of work that's awful, or amazing. Reminding yourself that in time you will look back and think some of your amazing work was awful, too. Reminding yourself that you *will* definitely suck one day, and that's okay.

LESS

CONTENT

MORE

CONTENT

**LOOKING BACK AND
REALIZING WHAT WAS
AWFUL IS EASY**

NEVER LOOK BACK

It is often said that hindsight is a wonderful thing. But let's be honest, it's useless. Looking back and realizing what went well is easy, realizing what went terribly is even easier. Foresight, the ability to predict what will happen or be needed in the future, would be a genuinely wonderful thing. Although it sounds like an impossible skill to develop, the words "you suck!" can help again.

Those words can help you to realize when things actually suck in the moment, rather than months or years down the line. They can help you to identify any parts of your work that aren't great right now, and they can help you to figure out if you should abandon something completely, or simply make a few changes to it.

Those words can give you the power of foresight. As counter-intuitive as it sounds, those constant reminders that you will one day look back and think that you suck can help you to keep looking forward. Those words can help you to dust yourself off, pick yourself up, and keep creating work. Even if that work sometimes sucks.

**YOU SUCK IS FREEDOM
TO BE YOURSELF THE
PERSON**

**AND TO FORGET ABOUT
YOURSELF® THE BRAND**

YOU ARE FREE

“You suck!” is freedom, and the sooner you accept that you suck the better. The sooner you will be free to make mistakes and bad work, without dismissing yourself as a failure each time you do. The sooner you will be free to make exactly the kind of work you want to make, without worrying that it must be perfect to have any worth.

THE SOONER YOU ACCEPT THAT YOU SUCK, THE SOONER YOU WILL STOP BEING SO AFRAID OF SUCKING IN THE FIRST PLACE.

This realization that you suck might not be restricted to your creative work, of course. It could be your full-time job, or your relationship, or your life in general that sucks. But it's okay if any of those things suck too.

Those words are here to help you, maybe even save you, again. They come from an older, wiser, and more experienced version of yourself. They can relieve the immense pressure you live under every day. The pressure for perfection in everything you do, say, think, and feel.

**THE ONLY WAY YOU
CAN EVER LIVE THE
LIFE YOU WANT TO, IS
BY FIRST ACCEPTING
THAT YOU ARE THE
ONE IN CONTROL OF IT**

YOU ARE IN CONTROL

If you suspect you may one day look back on your job or relationship and realize they suck, it's probably a good idea to think about changing things. If you suspect you may one day look back on your life and realize it sucks, it's definitely a good idea to think about changing things.

Changing your whole life for the better can obviously seem like an impossible task. It can be hard to even know where to begin. The only way to approach this task is by thinking small, thinking only of now. If you think you're going to look back on this particular day, or this particular moment, in the future and think it sucked, what small thing could you do right now to change that?

Go for a long walk with no destination in mind? Drink a large chocolate milkshake? Stop reading this book?! I don't have the answers to those questions. What I do know is that no matter how many books you read, how many talks you listen to, or how many amazing and wonderful people give you advice, the one person that has the power to change things for you, is you.

This can be hard to believe, when faced with the sheer number of things in life outside our control. This is why so many people end up living lives they never wanted. It's easy to lose focus on those things we can control, and become overwhelmed by those things we cannot.

The things within your control no doubt seem quite small; what you wear, what you eat for lunch, how long you spend gazing into your phone. The things outside of your control likely seem huge in comparison. That's why you should (and can) only focus on the first list. It's impossible for you to affect the events in the news, natural disasters, or the actions of an unhinged president.

The Serenity Prayer famously asks for the courage to change what must be altered, and the serenity to accept what can't be helped. Accepting a life you cannot control does require serenity, but actually *taking* control of your life needs courage. You have to be brave. You are the only person who will ever have the power to change your life. It's what you do with that knowledge that matters.

**THEY ALWAYS
TIME CHANGES
YOU ACTUALLY
CHANGE THEM
SAY THINGS,
BUT HAVE TO
YOURSELF**

– ANDY WARHOL

UGH, THAT REALLY SUCKED

I know, that was terrible. Learning that you suck will have either come as a total shock, or confirmed your worst fears. I hope the knowledge that everyone else, including me, sucks too helps you to realize it doesn't matter that you suck. In fact, nothing matters as much as you think it does. Sucking is freedom. The freedom to be whatever and whoever you want to be. The freedom to be your true self, unapologetically and without fear.

ASSIGNMENT

WHAT WILL SUCK?

Think about all the work you have ever made that sucked. Try to identify every specific thing that made each of those pieces so bad, from the huge glaring errors to the tiny things that only you would notice. Now think about your favourite piece of recent work, the piece of art you are most proud of making. Imagine looking back on this piece from sometime in the future, and try to imagine every little specific thing that will suck about it.

2

YOU ARE GOING TO FAIL

YOU HAVE ALREADY FAILED

I know “failure” is a terrifying word. It sounds so...final. It sounds impossible to overcome. How can you ever come back from getting fired, or dumped, or your book of creative advice bombing and selling zero copies? How can you ever truly come back from failure?

This may be hard for you to believe, but everyone has failed. Every author of every book you have ever read, including this one, has failed. Every one of your peers and every person you admire has failed. Everyone you know and love has failed, and all of them will fail again.

If you think about it, you know that you have already failed too, probably a lot of times. You will have had failures that felt like a little blip, and failures that no doubt felt like the end of the world. Some of them are probably already replaying in your mind right now, or they will if you take a moment to think about them. All of those past failures, whether they're at the front of your mind or a long-distant memory, can answer any questions or concerns you have about failing again in the future.

Each of those previous failures is a lesson. Some will offer you general reminders. That failure is okay, normal even. That failure is never as bad as you imagine it will be. That failure is rarely actually failing, by definition. That failure is never simply getting something wrong.

Some of those failures will offer more specific guidance. That you should tie your shoelaces properly before you leave the house. That you should never get a tattoo on a night out with friends. That you should stop thinking of all-you-can-eat buffets as a competitive task.

All of your past failures can answer the one burning question that you still have about failure itself. How can you ever come back from it? You already have done, many, many times. You have come back from all kinds of failures of all shapes and sizes, again and again.

**YOU HAVE COME BACK FROM SO MANY FAILURES THAT
YOU HAD KIND OF FORGOTTEN ABOUT MOST OF THEM.**



FAILURE IS SUBJECTIVE

Even though we know that everyone else fails, it can be hard to fully believe it. How badly can somebody have failed if they're an author, or a movie star, or a mom?

Well, the definition of the word "failure" is actually much more subjective than it first seems. We tend to think of failure in simple terms. We believe that it means getting something wrong, trying to do a thing and failing at it. But that's not what it actually means.

The dictionary definition of failure is a lack of success, and success is completely subjective. It is, or should be, defined by you. You can choose what success means to you, meaning you can choose what failure means too.

Failure isn't getting something wrong, because most times there isn't even a wrong answer anyway. You can instead choose to think of failure simply as trying. No matter what, you will always do things that *feel* like a failure to you. But each of those failures will be proof that you tried, and by trying you are making progress.

THIS IS NOT A GOOD COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

In 2012 the author Neil Gaiman gave possibly the most famous commencement speech of all time to the graduating students at the University of the Arts, London.

You may have seen it yourself, and you should look it up if you haven't. I watch it whenever I'm feeling lost, or I'm doubting myself, or I'm stuck in a seemingly endless creative rut. Watching this speech always, and without fail, inspires and motivates me in ways I can't begin to understand—maybe because the advice is so simple.

The central theme of the speech was to Make Good Art, no matter what: “Leg crushed and then eaten by a mutated boa constrictor? Make good art. IRS on your trail? Make good art. Cat exploded? Make good art. Someone on the Internet thinks what you're doing is stupid or evil or it's all been done before—make good art.”

Whatever terrible predicament you find yourself in, and whatever awful events are unfolding around you, making good art will always be your best way out.

**MAKE
GOOD
ART**

~~MAKE~~

~~GOOD~~

~~ART~~

I can personally vouch for this being good advice. Some of my best work has come as a result of awful situations or during bouts of terrible depression. But there's a flip side, too. A side that Neil didn't mention in his speech. He didn't mention it because it doesn't sound like inspiring or uplifting commencement speech advice. Not talking about this flip side was almost certainly a wise move.

But I'm not interested in telling you the same things as everyone else does, and I'm certainly not interested in only telling you things that will sound inspiring and uplifting in commencement speeches (unless I'm ever asked to give a commencement speech, obviously).

There's no surprise reveal, secret insider knowledge, or shock twist coming at this point. The other side of Make Good Art is exactly what you are probably imagining it will be: Make Bad Art, and make lots and lots of it. I can guarantee that for every piece of "good" art you see there will be a lot, and I'm talking about a Triceratops dung-sized pile, of "bad" art that you will never ever see.



“BAD “MEANING “GOOD”

Did you notice that I put “good” and “bad” in inverted commas? (I did it again, just in case you missed it the first time.) The reason I did that is those words are even more subjective than success and failure. In fact, you can eliminate good and bad entirely in regards to your work. You can Just Make Art. Some of it will be good and some of it will be bad. A lot of it will be neither.

The one certainty is that you will only ever be an artist if you are actually making art. If you spend your life agonizing over making only good art, you will never get anywhere, and you will never *be* an artist. None of the artists you love and admire wait for their ideas to form perfectly before acting on them, and none of them produce a masterpiece each and every time they try.

Success, failure, good, and bad are all subjective words. You choose their definition in relation to yourself, your work, and even your life. Humans of New York shared a wonderful post a while ago, where a woman talked about her divorce, that showed this to great effect.

The woman said that even though the end of a marriage is often seen as a failure by society, she chose to see her own divorce as a success. She had three amazing children as a result of that marriage, she said—how could she, or anyone else, view that as any kind of failure?

It can be hard to achieve this kind of perspective shift, especially with the larger issues in life, such as divorce. It can only be achieved by first shifting your perspective of the smaller issues and your tiny failures. Every ruined canvas, every unpublished novel, and every burnt cake can be some kind of success, if you decide they are.

**IF ANYTHING, YOU SHOULD SEEK OUT FAILURE MORE OFTEN.
ENCOURAGE YOURSELF TO MAKE MISTAKES AND MESS THINGS
UP A LITTLE.**

Allowing yourself the luxury of failure is obviously not easy. But once you do allow it in, failure can be a catalyst for something better. It can spark new and wonderful things into life, from what seems like ashes.

REJECTION IS #GOALS

We are often encouraged to set goals based on success, such as getting a piece of fiction published this year. The problem with these goals is they can quickly become limiting, even crushing. The moment you don't achieve even the smallest of your success-based goals, you can feel destroyed and be sent right back to square one.

A counter-intuitive sounding alternative approach is to set yourself failure based goals instead. For example, aiming to have twelve short stories rejected for publication this year. Each of those rejections will feel like a small (and increasingly easy) step towards completing your goal. More importantly, each rejection will be a very clear and definite sign of progress in your writing.

Twelve stories rejected means twelve stories finished and submitted. That's a much better indicator of progress than one half-finished story you spend a whole year agonizing over. That one perfect story you will only submit when the time is right. The truth is there will never be a right moment, and finished is always better than perfect.

JUST MAKE ART!

**WHAT'S THE
THAT COULD
WORST
HAPPEN?**

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

Failure is one of the many things we learn to be afraid of from a young age. It can command a very special kind of fear inside us. Anything that feels like it's limiting or blocking us in some way, especially creatively, is almost always just a different version of the same thing, fear.

It could be fear of failure, fear of success, fear of not being as good as others, fear of putting in the work, fear of success followed by failure, or even fear of fear itself.

Failure specifically is not as scary as we're led to believe it is, though. It's simply you asking yourself questions. It can help you to figure out your true desires, and your commitment to them. Failure will ask you, is this what you really want? Do you want to keep putting in the work? Are you prepared to risk failing like this again?

If the answer is no, to any of those questions, you will make your excuses and throw in the towel. If the answer is yes, you will somehow find a way to keep going and push yourself forward, no matter how hard it is.

If you find yourself paralyzed by a fear of failure, a good place to start is this question: what's the worst that could happen? Answer it any time that fear begins to creep in. If you were to try and fail what is literally the worst thing that you think could happen? In fact, let's try it right now.

Think about a project you have been putting off for a while because you're worried about failing. Imagine finally getting over those worries you have, shaking off your self-doubt, and putting an end to your procrastination. Imagine starting that project, and the process of working on it, in as much detail as you possibly can.

Imagine how you feel when you finish this project and you have created something. Now imagine that thing is a complete failure. What's the worst that could happen?

The actual outcome of any failures you have will never be as bad as the absolute worst you can imagine, and the absolute worst you can imagine will never be as bad as you think it will be before you start imagining it.

**I AM LEARNING EVERY
DAY TO ALSO ALLOW
THE SPACE BETWEEN
WHERE I AM AND
WHERE I WANT TO BE
TO INSPIRE ME AND
NOT TERRIFY ME**

– TRACEE ELLIS ROSS

STOP LIVING IN FEAR

You have already failed, and you will fail again. More importantly, you came back from all those failures, and you will come back from your next. Fear of failure can often mutate into a fear of even trying in the first place. But you are in control of what the word “failure” means to you. You can choose to see it as trying, then you can never truly fail. Each failure is simply proof you tried. The important part is you try again, and again.

ASSIGNMENT

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Defining success is an important exercise, but defining failure can be even more important. Take some time today to define what both words actually mean, to you. If you're not sure where to begin, answer the following questions. What have been your biggest failures and successes so far in life? How long did the feelings of success last? How long did it take to come back from the failures? What did you learn along the way?

3

**NOBODY CARES ABOUT
YOU**

YOU ARE NOT MY CENTER

I should start by saying that of course there *are* people who care about you. Your family and friends obviously care about you, for a start. There are probably some strangers who care about you too, which is lovely...or weird, depending on how you look at it.

But while it's true that all of those people do care about *you*, it's also true that nobody really cares *about* you. Nobody is as invested in your life as you think they are, although it can be hard to remember this. It can be all too easy to feel like everybody cares about you, a little too much. Like the whole world is watching you. Like there is a light shining down on you at all times. A light that highlights all of your flaws and weaknesses, and exposes every one your mistakes, no matter how small.

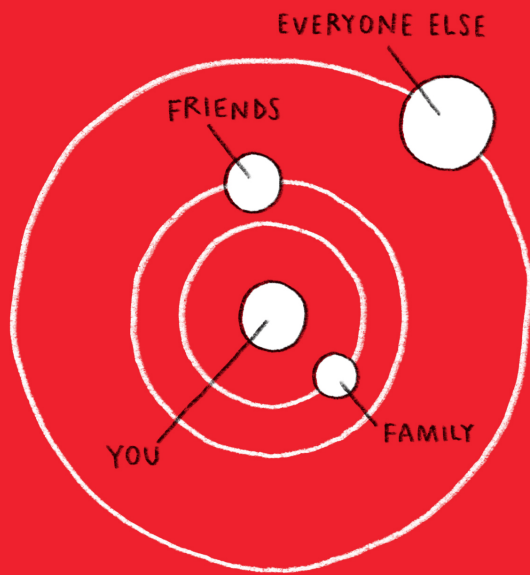
The reason this feeling comes so naturally is that it's true, there *is* a light shining on you at all times, in your own head at least. This feeling is a phenomenon called the spotlight effect, a term first coined by Thomas Gilovich and Kenneth Savitsky in their 1999 study.

Their initial research, and dozens more studies since, revealed that all of us overestimate how much other people notice us and, more importantly, overestimate how much they notice *about* us. This affects every one of us, from the world's most egotistical narcissists to people at the complete opposite end of the spectrum. No matter how you feel about yourself, you have a tendency to exaggerate your own importance in the world.

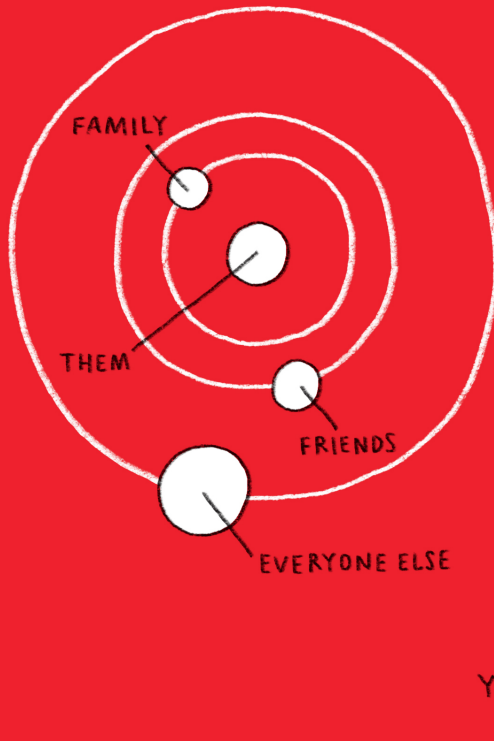
YOU HAVE A TENDENCY TO FORGET THAT YOU ARE NOT THE CENTER OF EVERYONE ELSE'S UNIVERSE, BECAUSE YOU ARE THE CENTER OF YOUR OWN.

There's nothing wrong with forgetting this, it's perfectly natural. You have spent your whole life experiencing the world through only your body. Everything you have ever seen was with your eyes, every sound you have ever heard was through your ears, every food you have ever tasted was with your mouth. All of these experiences were then filtered and interpreted by your brain.

YOUR UNIVERSE



EVERYONE ELSE'S



This makes it hard to step outside of yourself and keep perspective. It's hard to hold on to the truth, that nobody really notices you or cares about what you're doing.

People aren't judging you as you walk by. People aren't watching you closely, waiting for opportunities to point and laugh. People aren't actually giving you much thought at all, to be honest. Most people have far more important things to worry about than you, themselves.

Regardless of all this, the spotlight effect shines on each and every one of us. We are all walking around feeling like people are watching us intensely. We all imagine every single person is noticing every little thing we do, while we notice almost nothing about anyone else.

That awful mullet haircut you got? Nobody noticed. The bright red ketchup stain

on your clean white T-shirt? Nobody noticed. That time you crossed the street and fell flat on your face in front of hundreds of people? Okay, people noticed that, but nobody *really* noticed.

The average person can see hundreds of different people every day. Take a moment to think about how impossible it would be to genuinely notice every single one of them.

Think about how weird it would be to judge each person you cross paths with. How exhausted you would be if you remembered all of those thoughts and judgments. How insane you would be driven, thinking about every single one of those people in so much detail.

Let's do a quick experiment. Run through your memories of yesterday in your head, from beginning to end. How many individual people do you actually remember, from all those you encountered? How many specific details do you remember about each of those people?

You can probably count the answer to those questions on the fingers of one hand. Yet the spotlight effect encourages you to believe that this *is* how every other person in the world spends their time, even though you know rationally just how crazy that would be.

THE SPOTLIGHT IS GETTING BRIGHTER

The spotlight effect was prevalent enough way back in 1999 to be discovered, studied, and given a name. That was five years before the launch of Facebook, seven years before the very first tweet, and eleven years before Instagram revolutionized our lunch break.

Since its inception, social media has intensified and amplified the spotlight effect, almost exponentially.

In fact, social media has turned what was once a cognitive bias—a systematic error in thinking that affects our decisions and judgments—into a seemingly apparent truth. We literally *are* in the spotlight now, at all times, and on a completely unprecedented scale.

No matter how prevalent you are on social media, or how invested you are in it, its spotlight still shines on you. Even if you don't use social media at all, you can't escape. You still have friends and family watching “funny” videos on Facebook or reading tweets aloud at the dinner table. The spotlight is always there, and always shining.

C
AN
YOU
EVEN
SEE

ME

YOU DON'T ALWAYS CONTROL THE SWITCH

Social media tricks us into a false sense of autonomy when it comes to the spotlight effect. After all, we are the ones who are choosing what we share with the world and when. So surely it follows that we are the ones who are in control of when and where the spotlight shines?

Those of you who use social media to promote your work will know that nothing could be further from the truth. Social media employs all sorts of unknown rules and algorithms to dictate exactly how many people notice us, and it's never as many people as we hope. Humans are hardwired with a desire to be seen and heard. We have an innate need to feel acknowledged in some way.

Social media is designed to tap into these subconscious desires, and to amplify the need we feel. As the line between our online and offline lives becomes increasingly blurred—to the point that the line no longer exists for most of us, those lives are one and the same—social media is increasing the spotlight effect's reach. It is also increasing our desire to be illuminated by it.

The spotlight now shines on our life, or lives, online, as well as our life offline. It has expanded from our local area to the whole world. It's now even easier to forget we are not being noticed and judged all the time, when we are asking people to notice and judge us, all the time.

There will undoubtedly be more investigation into how social media has impacted, and continues to impact, the spotlight effect. But all of the truths that were discovered about this phenomenon before social media existed hold true, probably even more so.

EVEN THOUGH WE NOW ARE BEING WATCHED AND JUDGED THE WHOLE TIME, NOBODY IS WATCHING AND JUDGING US THE WHOLE TIME.

The truth is that everyone else is too wrapped up in their own life to think about you that much. Everyone else is also walking down the street wondering how to best phrase that funny tweet, or keeping their eyes peeled for Instagram gold, or just having regular real-life thoughts.

**MAKE ART LIKE
NOBODY CARES**

**(BECAUSE THEY REALLY
DON'T!)**

That actually highlights the cognitive bias of the spotlight effect. I was trying to illustrate that we're all in the same situation, that we all have the same concerns and we all think the same things. But social media has skewed my brain. I literally forgot about real life for a moment.

I was viewing the whole world from inside of my own tiny spotlit bubble, as a self-employed creative person. I forgot about the people who aren't posting their art online every single day, hoping that it connects them with people and, in turn, with opportunities.

I forgot about life away from social media, away from making and sharing art, and away from spending every waking moment trapped in a hustle-fuelled blur of content-creation and unrequited hope.

There is a reason for that slip of my brain. I'm writing a book aimed at artists, and social media is a huge part of being an artist today. But I forgot about the people who aren't me or you, the people outside of our spotlight.

**INSIGNIFICANCE
IS BLISS**

STEP OUT OF THE LIGHT

The spotlight effect has such a strong influence on our way of thinking that it narrows our field of vision. We forget about anyone but ourselves, without being able to see we're doing that. We can become so consumed by this focus on ourselves, that we subconsciously begin to assume everyone else is intensely focused on us too.

We assume that people are watching our every move—without actively thinking it—and this can quickly develop into paranoia. We begin to assume people are heavily invested in us. That they care deeply about everything we say, do, and feel. This isn't limited to people we know either. In fact, it can often feel stronger with strangers.

This fear, that everyone is noticing us at all times, can seep into every aspect of our lives. This paranoia—the feeling that everyone is in a constant state of making judgments about us—can be especially destructive for our creative work. The spotlight effect forces us to put so much pressure on our work that we begin to assume every piece of our work is also lit up by this spotlight.

We have this feeling that everything we make is so incredibly important, and everything we share must adhere to non-existent rules to be a success. That feeling can become so intense that we stop sharing, or even worse stop making, that creative work altogether.

So, it's important to proactively remind yourself about the spotlight effect. To remind yourself that, as harsh as it sounds, nobody really cares too much about what you're doing. People are not that invested in your work, or your life; they are too busy worrying about their own lives.

You have to detach yourself from the notion that you, or your work, are the center of anyone else's universe. The truth is you are a just speck of flesh, on a tiny lump of rock, rotating around a giant ball of fire, in the incomprehensibly vast black vacuum of space—exactly the same as the rest of us. You are wonderfully insignificant, in the grand scheme of things, and that frees you to make whatever creative work you want to.

It doesn't matter if you're a photographer who suddenly decides to start writing fiction, or vice versa. It doesn't matter if you are an artist who has been posting content daily, for years, and one day decide to stop. It doesn't even matter if the work you create is good or bad.

It's not a bad thing to admit the truth, that nobody cares about the work you put out into the world. In fact, your best work will come when you let go of the idea

that they do, when you begin to create things for yourself.

YOUR BEST WORK WILL COME WHEN YOU STEP OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT, ESPECIALLY IF IT FEELS LIKE YOU ARE STEPPING INTO DARKNESS.

Your best work exists outside of the imagined constant gaze and judgment. It exists in those dark corners of your mind that you don't often let other people see. It exists in those thoughts and feelings that you try to keep out of the spotlight altogether, those ideas you are not sure about, that leave you feeling just a little too exposed.

**NOT
EVERYTHING
DONE IN THE
DARK IS
SHAMEFUL**

– RAFAEL BARBA, *LAW & ORDER: SVU*

**NO ONE REALLY FEELS
SELF-CONFIDENT DEEP
DOWN BECAUSE IT'S AN
ARTIFICIAL IDEA. REALLY,
PEOPLE AREN'T THAT
WORRIED ABOUT WHAT
YOU'RE DOING OR WHAT
YOU'RE SAYING, SO YOU
CAN DRIFT AROUND THE
WORLD RELATIVELY
ANONYMOUSLY: YOU
MUST NOT FEEL
PERSECUTED AND
EXAMINED. LIBERATE
YOURSELF FROM THAT
IDEA THAT PEOPLE ARE
WATCHING YOU.**

– RUSSELL BRAND

PEOPLE CARE ABOUT YOU, NOT ABOUT YOU

You don't have to constantly worry what everyone else thinks about you, because in general people *don't* think too much about you, and that's not a bad thing. The spotlight effect may trick you into believing the whole world is watching and judging you, and your work, but they're not. You can be whoever and make whatever you like, free from that imagined scrutiny. "Nobody really cares if you don't go to the party."

ASSIGNMENT

LOOK INTO THE LIGHT

As you go about your day tomorrow, imagine there is a spotlight shining on every person you see. Imagine every single thing about every single person is highlighted by this light. All of their strengths and flaws, all of their thoughts and feelings. Try to remember just one little thing about each of those people, and imagine that everyone else is doing the same about everyone else. How many people do you see before you have to stop?

4

**EVERYONE IS BETTER
THAN YOU**

YOU ARE BETTER THAN THEM

Theodore Roosevelt once said that “comparison is the thief of joy.” While that is true, it doesn’t stop there. Comparison is also the thief of our ableness and acceptance, our accomplishments and adaptability, our ambition and appreciation, our assertiveness, our authenticity, and our autonomy—and those are just the words I could think of that begin with the letter A.

COMPARISON IS THE THIEF OF ALMOST EVERYTHING GOOD WITHIN US.

Comparison is not just a thief either, it’s an all-consuming force. Like the Nothing in *The NeverEnding Story*, the novel by Michael Ende. If you’re unfamiliar with the story, it’s set between the human world and a magical world called Fantastica (Fantasia in the movie, which you should definitely watch, if you haven’t).

The main antagonist in the story is the Nothing—an invisible entity whose sole purpose is to completely obliterate Fantastica, leaving nothing behind.

The world of Fantastica is a representation of human imagination. Every part of it is a direct result of humanity’s hopes and dreams, and the Nothing is fuelled by the loss of both. The more humanity’s imagination fades, the more we lose our hope, and the more we give up on our dreams, the more powerful the Nothing becomes.

This is exactly how comparison thrives too. Like the Nothing, comparison is invisible and powerful—and, like the Nothing, comparison becomes more powerful as our hopes, dreams, and imagination fade away.

COMPARING OURSELVES TO OTHER PEOPLE WILL NEVER BRING US ANYTHING GOOD, IT WILL ONLY BRING US NOTHING.

Although comparison is even more powerful than the Nothing, it provides its own fuel. The more we compare ourselves to other people, the more our hopes, dreams, and imagination fade. This causes even more comparison, and the whole thing becomes a vicious cycle.



COMPARISON IS A WEAPON

Comparison is nothing new, of course. We compare ourselves to other people from the first moment we're able to think, as humans always have done. It was when the advertising industry weaponized our natural tendency for comparison that it became a real problem.

When advertisers realized that the best way to make us do, ideally buy, something is by making us compare ourselves to other people. The people who are cooler or more attractive than us. The people who only buy their books from independent bookstores. The people who eat less meat, exercise more, and actually drink water.

THERE IS ALWAYS SOMEONE, OR SOMETHING, THAT IS BIGGER AND BETTER THAN US.

Comparison is being forced into our lives from all angles and, as always, social media is one of the worst culprits. Even if we never wanted it, social media has turned each and every one of us into a brand—and we are expected to stay on message consistently, and on brand constantly.

It doesn't matter if we use social media for our business, our side hustle, or just pictures of our cat—everything we post is marketing. We are all salespeople, whether we like it or not, and the thing we are selling is ourselves. This causes us to edit our lives for public consumption, creating a highlight reel to show the world.

There is nothing wrong with curating our lives like this—wanting to share only the good things is perfectly natural. But relentlessly absorbing the highlights of thousands of other people's lives often leads us to minimize and forget our own. Comparison means that while we are showing the world our very best side, we end up feeling like we are looking at everyone else's even better sides.

When we post a photo of ourself at the top of a mountain, we are instantly confronted with pictures of many other people at the top of many higher mountains—and at least one photo of someone who is somehow, completely inexplicably, building their own mountain.

The world is increasingly designed around us comparing ourselves to something, even the best bits of our own past. Every day we are shown another highlight from of our reel. We're reminded of that fancy lunch we were eating this time last year, while we Hoover up a bag of chips at our desk. We're encouraged to flick through photos of ourself on that beautiful beach five years ago, while we commute to the office in the pouring rain.

Everywhere we look, and in every area of our life, we are being pushed more and more towards comparison. It's so common in our lives that we have stopped noticing it.

Advertising encourages us to compare the things we have with the things we don't. Social media encourages us to compare our lives with the lives of friends, celebrities, and strangers. Our phone encourages us to remember how great that life of ours *used* to be, this time last year.

**COMPARISON WITH EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING IS NOW
OUR DEFAULT STATE.**

HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR TOAST?

Life is supposedly getting easier thanks to AI, algorithms, and other things I won't even pretend to understand. We're supposed to be shown more things we're interested in, and more things that we want to see, more often—without having to try. But this logic is flawed, because there is actually no logic at all, there is only data.

How many times have you bought something online—let's say, a toaster—and been bombarded with toaster ads for the next six months?

On the face of it, that makes sense. You *were* looking at toasters, so you probably want a toaster. The internet knows that so it shows you toasters relentlessly, hoping you bite and buy one. Yet, when you actually finally buy a toaster the all-knowing internet doesn't realize.

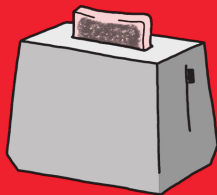
Even after you start using your new toaster, the internet will continue to show you all kinds of toasters. Cheaper toasters, better toasters, toasters that burn a cool little picture of your favourite cartoon character into the bread.

That is the dumb reality of the smart new world we live in. The internet doesn't know that most people don't need (or want) more than one toaster. But, maybe the internet isn't so dumb after all. Maybe there's more to it.

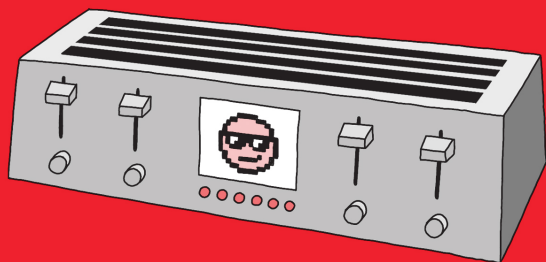
The internet will show you so many toasters that you might start to doubt yourself. Did you do enough research? Did you get a good deal? Did you buy the right toaster? That's the power of comparison—it encourages self-doubt better than anything else. Seriously, are you absolutely sure you don't want another toaster?!

This is the crux of the attention economy. The more we are shown things of interest to us, and the more time we spend looking at those things, the more opportunities there are to show us ads in between. Until we are looking at more ads than things we actually want to look at.

**NO MATTER WHAT YOU'RE INTERESTED IN, THE
ALGORITHM WILL SHOW YOU A WHOLE BUNCH OF (ADS
FOR) IT, CONSTANTLY.**



YOU



THE TOASTER SHE TOLD
YOU NOT TO WORRY ABOUT

THE ALGORITHM KNOWS

Despite the fact that its sole existence is to make us waste our time and money, the Algorithm is pretty incredible, especially if you like looking at art. So much new and wonderful art can be piped directly into your eyeballs, all day long, that you can barely keep up with it.

You can find art created by artists from every corner of the world. You can find new artists of all ages and from all backgrounds. You can follow artists of different levels of fame and at completely different stages of their career.

The problem is that the Algorithm knows you a little *too* well, and it applies the same toaster-shopping logic to the art it shows you. It knows that you like looking at art, and it knows the kind of art you like to create.

It takes that data, and decides you'd like to see more of the kind of art you like to make—and you're in luck, it knows all of the artists who are making work just like you. It even knows which of those artists are better or more popular than you, and it will happily show you.

This is why those compulsion loops from chapter 1 can be especially destructive for artists. Social media platforms and apps are literally engineered to take control of your brain. They are designed to make you spend more time looking at art than creating it. They are designed to make you compare yourself with other people and other artists who are just like you, only better—and they are exceptionally effective at doing so.

**THAT IDEA YOU'VE BEEN WRESTLING WITH FOR MONTHS
ON END?**

**LOOK AT THIS ARTIST WHO HAS ALREADY DONE IT, WAY
BETTER THAN YOU EVER WOULD OR COULD HAVE DONE.**

LOOK AT ALL THOSE LIKES AND COMMENTS.

LOOK AT ALL OF THEIR FOLLOWERS.

OH LOOK, THEY'RE ONLY TWELVE YEARS OLD!

THE INSPIRATION DECEPTION

Inspiration is bait that has been laid out for us by the attention economy. We're encouraged to believe that surrounding ourselves with art created by others will help and inspire us to flourish. But inspiration is a trap.

The longer we spend immersed in the work of other artists, the more we question our own core creative desires. The more our work becomes an amalgamation of everything we have seen. Like quicksand, the harder we struggle to break free from inspiration, the deeper we sink into it. We end up stranded in a sea of comparison.

We are pulled away from the art we truly want to make, and pushed towards the art others truly want to make. Self-doubt begins to creep in; should you be making comic books, or writing stories, or just give up entirely?

Autonomy has been completely removed from some areas of our lives and we surrendered without realizing. We believed in the sales pitch, that all of these things exist to make our lives easier, and to make us better.

Inspiration is one of the areas where we have completely given up this autonomy. We no longer need to actively seek out things to inspire us. For some reason, that we don't really understand, we now trust the Algorithm knows exactly what we want to see, and we let it show us. We know that all we need to do is log in, and scroll.

Motivational speaker Jim Rohn once said we are the average of the five people we spend most time with. A nice little sound-bite that became universally accepted wisdom, mainly because it's absolutely true.

Science is beginning to test this theory, and is finding out we are actually the average of every single person we spend time with. But, even more than that, we are the average of every single person they spend time with too.

WE ARE CONSTANTLY ABSORBING AND ADOPTING TINY FRAGMENTS OF OTHER PEOPLE, WHETHER WE KNOW IT OR NOT.

Inspiration works in much the same way. Your inspirations are the average of everyone and everything you expose yourself to, every day. You are inspired by all the ways that you interact with the world, from the mundane little moments to the huge and momentous occasions.

INSPIRATION COMES FROM INPUT.

However, more input does not automatically equal more inspiration—you also need variety. You need to proactively choose those people and things you will become the average of. You need to stop gazing up at people in awe, and look to the side. You need to stop scrolling for inspiration, and seek it out in the real world.

The things that will really inspire you are conversations you hear while walking down the street, the colour of the sky just after sunset, or the pizza you eat for lunch.

WHETHER YOU REALIZE IT, TRUE INSPIRATION COMES FROM YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE.



THERE IS ONLY ONE YOU

If you read any interviews with creative people about their inspirations—and every interview will be because it's the only question they get asked—you will often see other artists mentioned. This can make it feel like artists are the best, and only, place you must look for inspiration. But, that answer rarely means the interviewee takes direct creative inspiration from the work of those artists.

That answer is given for various reasons, almost all born out of respect and admiration for the other artist. Giving that answer is a great way to signal boost your friends. It's a great way to highlight and celebrate the art, and the artists, you love—and sometimes, it's just a very easy answer to what feels like a very boring question.

If work made by other artists—especially artists working in the same field as you—is your main source of inspiration, you will forever be at least one step behind, both them and yourself. You will always end up creating work that doesn't really feel like you made it. It won't feel quite right, but you will be unable to figure out why.

I'm sure there are people who look at another artist's amazing piece of work and feel directly inspired to create an amazing piece of their own, rather than wrestle with their self-loathing or wallow in self-pity. But I have never met a single one of those artists yet.

Jolting yourself out of the comparison spiral is one of the most important, and most difficult, things you can do for your own creative practice, and for your sanity.

Comparing yourself to others will only reveal one thing: Everyone is better than you. Escaping that comparison and listening to yourself more will help you to realize another thing: You are also better than everyone else.

No matter how talented or how successful another artist is, they can never be you. That's the one advantage you will always have. Your personality, quirks, and life experiences. Using *that*, your whole life story, as your inspiration and putting a piece of it, a piece of yourself, into your work is what will make it unique.

**FEAR OF
MISSING OUT ON
OTHER PEOPLE'S
LIVES MEANS
MISSING OUT ON
YOUR OWN**

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMEONE BETTER

Comparison is natural, but it has been weaponized by advertising and algorithms in aid of capitalism. To keep you buying, you are pit against everyone else. There is always someone, or something, bigger and better than you. You have to proactively push back against those embedded thoughts. While comparison causes you to believe everyone is better than you, it also causes everyone to believe you are better than them.

ASSIGNMENT

WOULD YOU FOLLOW YOU?

Take a look at your social media profiles today, and as you do this imagine you are someone else, as intensely as you can. Browse your profiles for a while, as if you were a complete stranger. Try to get a real sense of this person's life as you're scrolling. What were the highlights of their year? Do you notice that you are comparing yourself with them? How do their posts make you feel? Would you trade your life for theirs?

5

**YOU CAN'T JUST
DO WHAT YOU LOVE**

BORING ADVICE IS BEST

If you look anywhere, for creative advice one of the first things you'll come across is the insistence that you *must* Do What You Love.

You'll find this slogan on everything from TV ads to toilet rolls, and it's actually very sensible advice. You'll almost certainly always get better results when working on things you're passionate about, rather than things you couldn't care less about. But that should hopefully already be obvious to you, and hopefully will have been obvious to you long before you encountered this phrase for the first time. Enjoyment should be the bare minimum for the things you *choose* to spend your time doing.

The phrase Do What You Love is at best a vapid aphorism, and at worst dangerous and irresponsible advice. But it's still true regardless, and it's the truth that makes it so dangerous. There used to be a lot of other truths wrapped up with this phrase. Truths that are no longer mentioned but are even more important, and even more true. Without them, Do What You Love means nothing.

As our attention spans grew shorter, and vague positive aphorisms became more popular, that original collection of advice was whittled down more and more.

First to go was any mention of hard work—that really doesn't sell well. Talent was gradually forgotten about, networking and connections were ignored, and any mention of luck was eventually abandoned altogether. All that we were left with is that one little shining nugget of seemingly golden advice, Do What You Love!

It has become the rallying cry of a whole generation of artists, and it's actually the least helpful of all the advice. Those lost parts were much more useful to us, but in the end that was the problem. They were a little too sensible. They were just a little too much like, well, good advice. It was too easy to shrug your shoulders and say "I know."

The final nail in the coffin of all that sensible, honest, and useful advice was that it didn't look that great on a screen printed poster, in beautiful hand-drawn lettering.

Can you imagine anyone sticking a beautiful decorative poster to their wall that says:

DOING WHAT YOU LOVE IS REALLY HARD WORK

or:

**EVEN IF YOU WORK REALLY HARD AT WHAT YOU
LOVE A MASSIVE AMOUNT OF IT IS PURE LUCK**

or:

**MAKE SURE TO PUT THE CORRECT AMOUNT OF
MONEY FROM EACH JOB IN A SEPARATE BANK
ACCOUNT SO YOU CAN PAY YOUR TAX BILL AT
THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR**

No, me neither. Although I did just make a poster of that last one for myself. Okay, okay, I wrote it on a post-it note—but that one really is golden advice.

**PUT YOUR TAX IN A
SEPARATE BANK
ACCOUNT DO NOT
TOUCH IT!**

**DOING WHAT
YOU LOVE IS
REALLY HARD
WORK**

THE PEBBLE AND THE MOUNTAIN

Do What You Love was merely a tiny pebble of advice on a whole mountain of it. The first time someone said “Do What You Love” on its own was the equivalent of them kicking that pebble off the top of the mountain. It sounded amazing and, more importantly, it sounded easy. As it rolled down the side, it began to gather snow.

In advertising terms, the phrase sold well. This led more people to say it, which led more people to put it on posters and T-shirts. That little pebble of advice rolled and rolled, gathering more and more snow. Until it was a huge unstoppable snowball, hurtling towards us.

That happens a lot with advice, especially in the age of likes and retweets. If someone says something that resonates with a lot of people, even more people will start to say it too. People have built whole careers on the back of things other people have said. Even if they don't really understand the true meaning of those things, even if they have taken those things completely out of context, and even if they don't believe those things at all.

It always helps if those things look good on a poster, and ideally in a square. Some kind of positive-sounding slogan like Good Vibes Only, the less vocational cousin of Do What You Love. Good Vibes Only is more of a big-picture, all-encompassing life philosophy. Although it still suffers from the same problems as all of the other good-looking, inspirational-sounding slogans.

Again, the central thrust of this phrase is very true. But, again, all of the useful stuff—cutting toxic people out of your life, limiting your exposure to harmful situations, practicing gratitude—has been thrown in the trash.

IT'S EVEN MORE IMPOSSIBLE TO LIVE A LIFE OF *ONLY* GOOD VIBES THAN A LIFE WHERE YOU *JUST* DO WHAT YOU LOVE.

There must be people who come close, people who love all aspects of life intensely. But they still have to wash dishes and take out the trash, and nobody can convince me that cleaning the toilet is a Good Vibes Only activity.

**WHERE WOULD YOU
GO?**

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

WHO WOULD YOU BE?

WHY HAVEN'T YOU?

THE EASY PATH

You will come across this kind of advice so often in your career that it can become impossible to ignore. You will hear all kinds of artists tell you to just do what you love, exactly like they did. You will hear these slogans so often that you can start to believe they are true.

You can start to believe that *just* doing what you love will make everything else fall neatly into place, as long as you love it enough. You can start to believe that *just* doing what you love is one of the true secrets to success, because people you admire are telling you that it is.

A 2017 study at University College London explained the appeal of these easy-to-swallow nuggets of advice. A team of researchers found that humans are hard-wired to seek the path of least resistance throughout life.

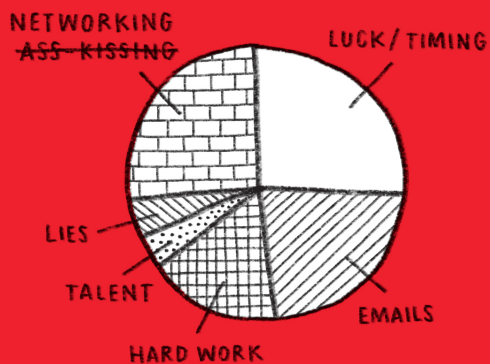
We are genetically drawn to always favour the option which seems most easy from those available to us. Our brain even tricks us into believing that the easier option will ultimately bring us the greatest reward.

This is the reason millions of people play the lotto every week, despite the odds being stacked so heavily against a jackpot win. It's the highest possible reward from the lowest possible risk. It's also the reason Do What You Love is such effective and eagerly consumed advice.

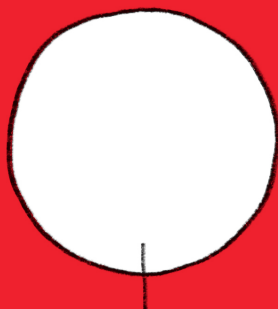
Most successful people will agree that hard work is a vitally important ingredient in any kind of achievement. Any successful people who tell you to *just* do what you love are forgetting and minimizing their own hard work. They are forgetting about all of the late nights and the low pay. They are forgetting about the uncertainty, the constant hustling, and the sheer dumb luck of it all.

They are forgetting to tell you that doing what they love was not the easy path after all, not even close. They are forgetting to tell you that even though they are now successfully earning a living by doing what they love, they love it that little bit less now that it's their full-time job. They are forgetting to tell you that doing what you love is, was, and always will be the more difficult path.

HOW THEY ACHIEVED SUCCESS




HOW THEY THINK
THEY ACHIEVED SUCCESS



~~I WORKED FUCKING HARD~~

I DID WHAT I LOVE



DO WHAT
YOU LOVE

I'M LOST TOO

Despite my feelings about the phrase, I'm essentially a Do What You Love success story. It's the main reason I'm sitting here writing this book. One day I started drawing, the thing I used to love doing most, rather than continue to look for another regular job. I had no great master plan. I was just completely devoid of other ideas or desires.

The short version of that particular story is I had been back in England a few months, after a year of traveling around the world. I was actively looking for a job, but still unemployed. During my year away I had grown increasingly disillusioned with my chosen career, and that feeling was fuelled with every new job rejection.

Eventually, I decided I had to do something different with my life, something I loved. So I started to draw for fun, for the first time in years. I uploaded those drawings to tumblr, mainly so they existed outside of my sketchbook. That blog quickly began to attract press features, and I started to get illustration commissions. Within two years those drawings formed my first published book.

To people who didn't know me, it looked like doing what I love was equalling huge success. But I wasn't *just* doing what I loved, and I wasn't even really successful.

I was doing what I love in between freelance graphic design work for my old boss, and anyone else I could find. I was selling clothes that nobody wanted to buy for my former company on eBay. I also started selling products with my drawings on them. I made hundreds of different things by hand every week, for a tiny profit.

JUST DOING WHAT YOU LOVE CAN NEVER GUARANTEE SUCCESS. SADLY, NOR CAN HARD WORK.

I was working really hard, in many different jobs, and still wasn't getting anywhere. I didn't even make enough money to pay taxes for the first five years. During the period I received my biggest press features, and while my first, second, and third books were published, I was broke and living in a spare room at my parents' house.

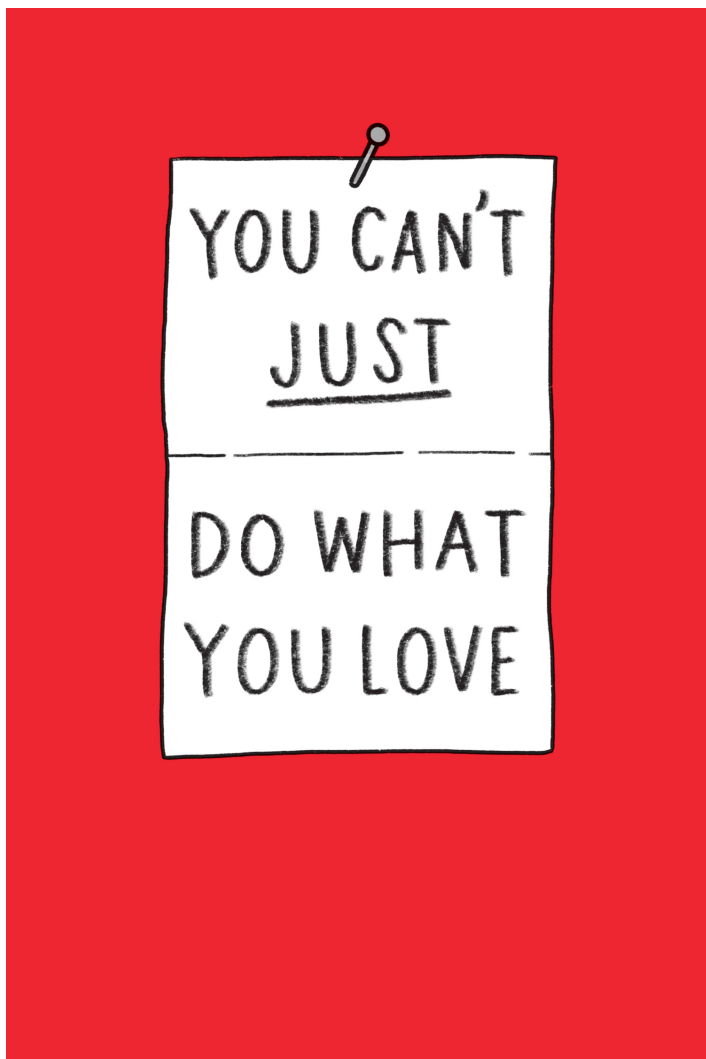
I was very lucky to have that room, and even more lucky to have a mom who supported my decision to just start drawing rather than get a real job. I even feel strangely lucky that my self-esteem was so low by that point that all of this felt completely normal and sane.

I was actually still looking for a new job, or trying at least. In fact, my full-time job

was looking for and applying to full-time design jobs. England was in recession at the time, making that a thankless task. My visit to sign on at the job center twice a month was even more thankless. So I started drawing initially just to keep myself sane.

I started doing what I love to help me keep going, and to help me hold on. I never intended to build a career by doing it, I didn't think that was possible. It just happened somehow. With work, time, luck, and a whole lot more, doing what I love eventually became my full-time job.

BUT I WAS NEVER *JUST* DOING WHAT I LOVE, AND I'M STILL NOT TODAY.



DON'T LOVE IT, DON'T DO IT

I do believe that doing what you love should be the driving force behind your creative pursuits. You have to love making art, otherwise there's no point making it. If you don't love what you do, nobody else will. If you don't love what you do, you shouldn't do it. If you don't love—or even just like—what you do, you *can't* do it.

I believe even more strongly that it's all the advice people are no longer giving that will actually help you. I believe even more strongly that you can't *just* Do What You Love.

Too many people quit when that slogan, as advertised, doesn't pay off. But the brutal truth is that doing what you love may never pay off. No matter how hard you work, no matter how talented you are, and no matter how much you love doing what you love. If you're doing what you love, the actual doing of it has to be the reward.

**YOU HAVE TO DO WHAT YOU LOVE BECAUSE YOU LOVE IT,
NOT BECAUSE IT'S THE EASY ROUTE TO SUCCESS.**

YOU SHOULD STILL DO WHAT YOU LOVE!

Despite everything I've said, you should continue to Do What You Love. The things you love will always lead you to opportunities and people that are aligned with your passions. But don't forget about the boring stuff—all the hard work and late nights—that comes when What You Love becomes How You Live. Don't forget that doing what you love still might not lead anywhere. Don't forget that you can never *just* Do What You Love.

ASSIGNMENT

THE BITS YOU WON'T LOVE

If you could have a career doing the one thing you love, what would that thing be? Take a few moments to imagine yourself in that dream job. You are doing what you love and getting paid for it. Imagine the day-to-day specifics of this dream life, and make a to-do list for an ordinary day. List every little task, no matter how trivial it seems. How many things on this list are not What You Love? How many of those things do you do already?

6

**YOU ARE NEVER GOING
TO MAKE IT**

NOBODY EVER MAKES IT

Having big dreams is incredibly important, in both your career and your life. Imagining a big promotion, or your first book deal, or getting married can be a powerful and motivating force. If you never thought about making it at all you would be crazy.

No matter how much you love what you do, you have to believe that it's going to lead somewhere in order to keep doing it. That's what will get you out of bed each morning, and that's what will make sure you continue to turn up and put in the hours, day after day.

The hope that all of your hard work will eventually lead to something. That your efforts will have some kind of payoff in the end. That, one day, you will make it.

THE ONLY WAY YOU WILL EVER ACHIEVE BIG THINGS IS BY FIRST DREAMING ABOUT THEM.

THE ONLY WAY YOU WILL EVER MAKE IT, IS BY HAVING AN "IT" IN THE FIRST PLACE.

At the same time, it can be hard to imagine yourself ever actually making it, especially when you're just starting out. When you first start anything, especially creative work, your wildest dreams can seem laughably far away. That's what makes "fake it 'til you make it" so attractive, and why it can be such an effective strategy.

There are many problems with faking it 'til you make it, though. The biggest of those is a surprising one: you will never actually make it. That's not to say you won't achieve your wildest dreams or you won't do amazing things. The reason you will never make it is because there is no "it." Well, there is, but it is constantly moving.

As you progress and evolve throughout your career, "it" will change and evolve with you. "It" is in a constant state of flux. It will come tantalizingly close to you and it will, and should, pull agonizingly farther away.

MOST TIMES, THE FARTHER AWAY "IT" IS FROM YOU THE BETTER.

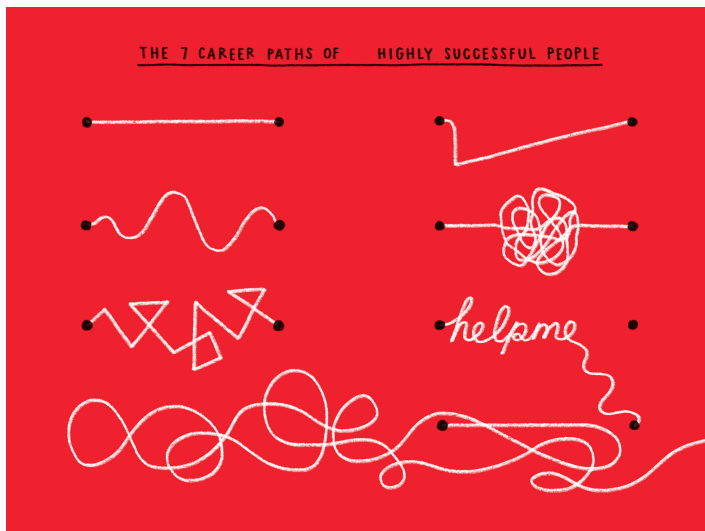
**IF YOU AIN'T
GOT DREAMS
WHAT THE
FUCK YOU
GOT?**

IT WILL NOT MAKE YOU HAPPY

Making it and happiness have many things in common. We're told that happiness is a destination we should head towards. We're led to believe that once we get *to* happiness we will *be* happy, and we're encouraged to see this pursuit of happiness as our main purpose in life.

We're finally beginning to realize happiness is actually a part of our journey, not a destination. Happiness is one of a range of our emotions and, like all of the others, it comes and goes, it changes over time. The same is true of "it." Despite what we're told, it is not a destination we can reach, and it evolves as we do. Despite what we are told, when we make it we have not *made* it.

Happiness does not last forever, which is something we should be thankful for. Experiencing our full range of emotions is what makes us human, and constant eternal happiness would drive us insane. We should celebrate never making it for the same reasons. The fact we will never make it is what keeps pushing us to improve and evolve, it's what helps us to keep going.



YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST TIME

You should never think of making it as the end of your journey, it is only ever one end to one journey. I say that from experience, as someone who has “made it” several times. This is the sixth book I have written, and I have lost count of what number “it” that is for me.

None of the last five books I have written have given me the same feelings of excitement, or the same feelings of making it, as my first book did. Writing a book was something I used to dream about as a kid. I loved to make art, and I used to imagine how amazing it would be to have a book of that art published.

But publishing a book of art felt way out of reach for a working-class kid in a small English town. Especially a town whose most famous resident was a Victorian serial killer called the Prince of Poisoners.

As I got older that dream faded more and more quickly. It drifted further away from me, until I gave up on it some time during high school, as so many kids do.

So when my first book was published, I really felt like I had made it. Even though it was a small book with a small publisher. Even though it was only tiny, in the grand scheme of things, it felt like I had achieved an incredible and unachievable dream, and I had.

The first time you make it and achieve one of your big dreams you will feel incredible, as you should. You can feel almost invincible, for a little while at least.

Eventually, though, you will inevitably begin to wonder what all the fuss was about. You have made it, but nothing feels all that different. You're not instantly successful, or famous, or even making enough money to live (if you are lucky enough to be making any money at all).

YOU REALIZE THAT IT'S PROBABLY TIME YOU START WORKING ON THE NEXT BIG PROJECT, AND DREAMING THE NEXT BIG DREAM. YOU REALIZE THAT YOU HAVE TO START MAKING IT, ALL OVER AGAIN.



IT IS ALWAYS CHANGING

For a long time “it” was a book deal for me. Once I achieved that it became a book deal with a major publisher. Once I achieved that it became a book that sold well, whatever that meant. Once I achieved that, it became a book translated into other languages. Once I achieved that, well, you’re reading it right now.

Writing this book has been a complete reset of what I thought the next “it” was for me, for many reasons. The whole process of writing this book—and that includes the whole process of writing the five before it—actually helped me to realize that it is always moving. But, more importantly, that I’m the one who is moving it.

I am in control of what “it” is, and the same is also true for you. You are the only person who can ever define when you have made it. At least, that is how it should be. But making it is another area of our career, and our life, that can be strongly influenced and badly infected by our tendency for comparison. It can be hard to remember you are actually the one who is in control of it.

YOU CONTROL YOU

You will naturally look to your peers and the leaders in your field for clues of what making it should look like for you. You will find all the people who are making it, and making it look easy. Those people who are sitting proudly at the top of the pile, successful and happy.

If you're still unsure of what making it would look like for you, this can be deflating. It can be deflating even if you know exactly what making it would look like for you, and even if you feel like you have actually made it already. If you are not as happy or successful as you thought you would be, or as those people seem, this can easily develop into another crushing downward spiral.

This is why it's so important to remind yourself that you *are* in control of your own definition of making it—and “It” can be as big or as small as you want it to be. The best advice I can give is to actually forget about making it altogether, or at least to let go of any ideas you have about “it” being the end. It will never be a point where you simply sit back and reap the rewards of your success.

You can think of “it” as a single step on a staircase. Each step you take on that staircase is a new target reached, a new dream achieved, a new it. Each step you climb up that staircase is you making it, little by little—and each of those steps, each of those its, is first laid by you.

You decide what that staircase will look like, how many steps there are, and how high each step will be. When you begin building, the staircase may seem small—there may even be only one step. But as you begin to climb you will keep on building. You will decide what comes next, by adding more steps, more dreams, and more its, until the top of the staircase disappears from view.

EVEN IF YOUR BIGGEST DREAM FEELS RIDICULOUSLY OUT OF REACH RIGHT NOW, BY THE TIME YOU ACHIEVE IT AN EVEN BIGGER DREAM WILL HAVE ALREADY APPEARED TO TAKE ITS PLACE.

YOU ARE IN
CONTROL

HOW'S THE VIEW?

It's important to celebrate whenever you reach a new step. Whenever you achieve one of your dreams, it's important to stop there for a while and be proud of yourself. It's important to acknowledge those times when you *do* make it, and to reward yourself for it, too.

At each new step, it's important to look back at all of the steps you have climbed to get there. It's important to look out and admire the view from that step. It's even more important to take note of how this view has changed and evolved as you have climbed higher and higher.

AS CLICHÉD AS THIS WILL SOUND, IT GENUINELY IS THE JOURNEY THAT MATTERS, NOT THE DESTINATION.

Getting to one "I've made it" step will, and should, always cause you to think about the next step, and the steps after that. Even if one day you feel like you have really made it this time, once and for all, you will eventually start to think "Okay, what comes next?"

You can make that process intentional rather than accidental. You can proactively think about what your next step, and your next steps, will be before you actually get to them. You can think about every little "it" along the way, instead of wondering what comes next when the "I've made it!" feelings begin to fade.

Once you get into this habit, you will naturally start to break down your biggest dreams into smaller, more manageable, chunks. Each of those dreams, and each of those chunks, becomes a new "it." You will begin to see each of them as a step on the staircase you are building yourself, rather than a predetermined destination.

You will never make it to the top of this staircase, of course, that's the whole point. In the end, you will keep on climbing purely because you love to climb.

YOU WILL NEVER MAKE IT, ONCE AND FOR ALL. YOU WILL MAKE IT, OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

BUT, WHAT ABOUT ...

I know there is a burning and obvious question I am yet to address. A question you have no doubt been silently screaming into these pages for the whole chapter.

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO *HAVE* MADE IT?

What about those people who reached the top of their staircase, had it converted into an escalator, then covered it in gold?! Those authors who are writing best-selling horror novel after best-selling horror novel, for example.

There will always be people like that, people who look like they have well and truly made it. Our celebration of success will always push these people further to the top of the pile, and keep them in view longer. That makes a lot of sense: The more successful someone is the more we will obviously see and hear about them.

But it's important to remember that those people are the extreme exceptions and not the general rule. Which is something I will talk more about in the next chapter.

The one secret all those people share is they have long since forgotten about the “it” part altogether—except possibly when writing books about killer clowns. Those people think only about the making part of making it. The journey, the actual making of the work, is “it” for them. Success is a very welcome side effect.

Obviously that's simplifying things. Those people did set out to be successful, and there are obviously many other important factors which have affected their success. All different kinds of privileges have a huge impact on any possible routes to the top of the staircase.

Class, gender, health, race, sexuality, and many more subjects all require whole libraries of books to pick apart, written by people much more knowledgeable than I am. But, despite all of those privileges, one fact remains true.

THOSE PEOPLE WOULD STILL BE MAKING THE ART THEY ARE MAKING IF THEY HAD NEVER “MADE IT” IN THE FIRST PLACE.

MAKING > IT

YOU DECIDE WHAT “IT” IS

It is not your destination, it is a step on your journey. It is a marker of progress. It will change and evolve over time, as you do. It is a decision you will make, again and again. It is the thing that will drive you forward. It is a flare you will fire into the distance, to show your direction without ever illuminating your path. It is not the end of your journey. It is not a place that you will arrive at, and stop. It is whatever you want it to be.

ASSIGNMENT

WALK BACK FROM THE END

Imagine you have achieved the next big goal on your horizon. You have made it, whatever “it” is. Now take one small step backwards. What does life look like here? Look around, as intensely as you can, at all the details of your life at this step. Now take another step back, and take another look around. Take another step, and another look. Keep taking little steps backwards until you are here, today. Now, start walking forwards.

7

**YOU WILL NEVER
CHANGE**

DON'T DRINK THE KOOL-AID

One of the most damaging images we're sold is that of highly successful people. The relentless productivity machines who wake up at 4 a.m. every day, eat a nutritious breakfast, run 10k, and get to inbox zero before we have even hit snooze for the first time.

Those people who then crush work hard until way past midnight, and somehow find the time to raise a family, indulge in various life-enriching hobbies, and binge-watch the latest Netflix sensation among it all.

We're told that if we learn their secrets and follow their ways we will—not can—be highly successful too. We have to stop believing these lies, and stop buying into the hype. The secret routines of highly successful people are just another version of Do What You Love.

ALL OF THOSE THINGS OFFERING SEEMINGLY GUARANTEED ROUTES TO SUCCESS ARE SNAKE OIL. THEY ARE SIMPLY GET RICH QUICK SCHEMES FOR GETTING THINGS DONE.

We have become borderline obsessed with the routines, schedules, and sleep habits of highly successful people. They are exactly what we want. As we already learned, we're hard-wired to follow the path of least resistance and favor the option which seems most easy. When we hope to be successful, that will always be following closely in the footsteps of someone who already is.

THE JUICIEST WORM ON A HOOK IS THE PROMISE OF CHANGING YOUR LIFE. ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S DANGLED BY SOMEONE WHO HAS ALREADY CHANGED THEIRS.

But, the people selling you these life-changing systems have rarely changed in the ways you would need to. Productivity advice tends to come from people who are already productive, and a naturally productive person can never advise a naturally unproductive person. Just as someone who has never experienced true depression will never be able to understand it, a productive person can never understand someone who is not.

They are convinced all we need to do is adopt the right system, or the right attitude, to start getting shit done.

The truth is there are no easy tricks or routines we can adopt that can guarantee our productivity. Our relentless quest for machine-like efficiency is slowly, but very

surely, killing us. It's eating away at our enjoyment, our free time, and our every waking thought.

We're increasingly told doing things without tangible monetary value is a complete waste of our time. So we increasingly believe our hobbies are worthless, unless they can quickly develop into a monetizable side hustle.

**WE INTERNALIZE THESE LIES AND BECOME CONVINCED THAT
WE ARE A WASTE OF TIME, UNLESS WE ARE MAKING MONEY.**

But we don't *have* to be productive twenty-four-seven, despite what we're told. Relentless productivity doesn't have to (and should definitely not) be our main life goal.

**PRODUCTIVITY
IS NOT YOUR
PURPOSE**

YOU ARE THE RULE

Of course, there are people who do change their whole life by adopting crazy a routine or running away to live in the jungle. But these people are more of the extreme exceptions I talked about in the last chapter, they are not the general rule. A big problem is that most advice we are sold comes from those extreme exceptions.

Most of the advice that gains popularity is from people who believe their routine is akin to a magic spell. Or from the boot camp sergeants who genuinely believe that if we just pull up our socks and stop whining we'll be able to get things done, with almost laughable ease.

An overwhelming percentage of popular modern advice is skewed completely in favour of these exceptions and completely discounts the rules. So much so that we have started to believe the exceptions *are* the rules.

We are encouraged to believe that our lives need to undergo big changes, and that the only way we can achieve them is by doing big things, written in big letters.

The advice given to us by the extreme exceptions is often about making huge sweeping life changes: Quitting our job, getting rid of all our crap, and traveling the world with nothing but a backpack. As someone who has done all three of those things, I can tell you it's not that easy.

Most of us will be able to count the number of really big changes we make throughout our lives on the fingers of one hand. The real and lasting changes we make are often much smaller, so small we barely notice them.

Tiny changes like this can have a huge positive impact. A famous example of this comes from the 1980s, when American Airlines famously saved \$40,000 a year by removing a single olive from every salad they served in first class. We can figure out ways to apply that same logic to our lives, even if we only ever fly coach.

The biggest changes we make in our lives will be the small things that we don't even really notice. Like removing a single olive or, more likely, adding some cheese.

A huge amount of scientific evidence suggests that the core of our personality is set during childhood. There are conflicting ideas about exactly when this happens, but there is a definitive agreement that it does happen.

In other words, we become who we are early on in life. Our personality fluctuates and changes with time and age but our core, the essence of us, remains the same.

IN GENERAL TERMS MOST PEOPLE DON'T CHANGE MUCH AT ALL, EVEN IF THEY TRY.

That means if you're an introvert, a procrastinator, or a perfectionist, you almost certainly will be for the rest of your life. It can be hard to accept, but changing your core self in huge ways is virtually impossible, no matter how many books you read, how many TED talks you watch, or how many days you go for a run at 4 a.m.

EVEN IF YOU FOLLOW SOMEONE ELSE'S PATH TO SUCCESS, YOU WILL STILL BE YOU.

**WE'RE TRICKED INTO
BELIEVING WE SHOULD
CHANGE, INSTEAD OF
ENCOURAGED TO ACCEPT
WHO WE ARE**

TAKE
WHAT
YOU
NEED

MONEY

IDEAS

WORK ETHIC

TALENT

ICE CREAM

WEAKNESS DOESN'T MEAN WEAK

Most of the advice I've been arguing against so far focuses on eliminating or changing our weaknesses in some way. It tells us that we should stop procrastinating, get over our fear of failure, and get up early, for god's sake.

Advice like this is another thing that sells well with us. We are inclined to see our weaknesses as much more changeable than our strengths. We tend to trust that our strengths will naturally stay strong, and believe our weaknesses can be easily improved or eliminated.

Our weaknesses are another powerful sales tool. We all tend to believe we have some weaknesses, and we tend to believe we need to eliminate them. We imagine this is easily achievable, and there is an ever-growing glut of things we can buy that promise to help.

But changing our weaknesses is actually impossible, and we should stop trying. All of our weaknesses are just as big a part of us and our core self as our strengths are; changing them in huge ways is just as impossible.

In fact, we should stop thinking of our weaknesses as weak altogether. No matter what area of our life they are in, all of the things that we consider weak are actually trying to tell us something. Procrastination, perfectionism, anxiety, depression, and anything else we may consider "weak" are rarely just there, for no reason at all.

THEY ARE MESSAGES, NOT WEAKNESSES.

The most productive thing we can do is to actually learn to work *with* those weaknesses, rather than spend all of our energy trying to change and erase them—then berating ourselves for not being able to do so. I know this because for a long time I tried my best to change and eliminate my biggest weaknesses, as advised.

I'm a massive procrastinator, and I have genuinely tried very hard to stop. I tried to start projects earlier, and I tried to keep working even when my brain was dragging me away to other things. But, the more I tried to stop procrastinating, the more I seemed to procrastinate.

The more new routines I tried, and the more productivity hacks I read, the worse it all got. It got to the stage where I started procrastinating on procrastinating, before I even got around to procrastinating on my work.

A while ago I decided to try a different approach. I started to listen to all of my weak impulses and urges instead, and to lean into what I heard. If I felt like I needed to go for a walk rather than sit at my desk, I went for a walk.

I began to understand that I need to allow myself time to procrastinate at the start of a project. I learned that is how I think and process, it's how I make plans and generate ideas. As ridiculous as I know this may sound, procrastinating is honestly how I get things done.

I learned that I'm not actually procrastinating at all. It just *feels* like I am, because I'm doing something that is not traditionally seen as work. Like everyone else, I have been conditioned to believe that things which don't look like work can't possibly be productive.

LISTEN TO YOUR WEAKEST IMPULSES

(WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO SAY?)

SWIM WITH THE TIDE

Of course there are still times when I'm procrastinating lazily rather than productively or with purpose. There are plenty of those times, believe me. But the only way I ever learned to tell the difference—between the two different forms of my procrastination—was by allowing myself to procrastinate in the first place.

I had to listen to what that procrastination was telling me, and I had to figure out all of the things that were actually causing me to procrastinate to begin with.

I was obviously in a privileged position to allow myself to go for walks and watch movies during work hours. Well, I was self-employed, flat broke, and with no paying work on the horizon. But at least I was my own boss.

It's much harder to figure out how to work with your weaknesses when you're in a regular nine-to-five job. There aren't many bosses who would be happy if you said you need to go for a walk and have a think for a few days, before you make a start on that big project.

It was during full-time work that I first began to work with my weaknesses, though. It was in a regular job where I first figured out that I *needed* that time to procrastinate. It was between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (read: 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.) I realized the time I spent procrastinating was actually productive for me.

Whenever my boss gave me a new project, I would start by crossing off every little unrelated task on my to-do list, even the ones that I really hated. I would reply to all my emails, clean my desk, and even make all the phone calls I had been putting off for weeks (read: months).

This was how I procrastinated in a real job, by doing all the boring work I had been avoiding. This was how I allowed myself that space I needed to think and plan.

This is one of the main ways I still procrastinate now, to be honest. But back then it had the added bonus of looking like I was being efficient and working extremely hard, rather than avoiding my work altogether.

As I leaned into those weaknesses and started to work with them more and more, I discovered a strange truth. Working with your weaknesses, rather than fighting against them, is actually the path of least resistance.

It sounds completely illogical, but the more I let myself procrastinate the more efficiently I got my work done. The more I accepted all of my other weaknesses, the

better I got at walking the line between getting things done despite them, and surrendering to them completely.

Every one of your weaknesses exists for a reason—and, more important, they don't actually mean you are weak. To think of your self-doubt, or your depression, or your inexperience as a weakness is to misunderstand them entirely. All of those things will contain an important message for you, if you look at them from the right angle.

**ALL OF YOUR WEAKNESSES WILL BE WITH YOU FOREVER.
IT'S TIME YOU START LISTENING TO WHAT THEY'RE
SAYING.**

**WORKING WITH YOUR
WEAKNESSES IS THE
PATH OF LEAST
RESISTANCE**

**WHEN YOU ACCEPT
YOU ARE A
PROCRASTINATOR, YOU
WILL BECOME MORE
PRODUCTIVE WITH
YOUR TIME.**

**WHEN YOU
ACKNOWLEDGE YOU
ARE A PERFECTIONIST,
YOU WILL LEARN THAT
PERFECTION IS BORING
IMPOSSIBLE!**

**WHEN YOU ADMIT YOU
ARE AFRAID TO FAIL,
YOU WILL GROW
BRAVE ENOUGH TO TRY
ANYWAY.**

YOU DON'T NEED TO CHANGE

You have been duped into believing that things such as procrastination, depression, and shyness are weak. You have been sold the fallacy that you can change these weaknesses with ease. But you don't need to and you should stop trying. Every weakness you have is actually a message. If you can figure out what they're trying to say, your weaknesses can offer you guidance and direction—they can even become one of your strengths.

ASSIGNMENT

READ BETWEEN THE LINES

Write the word “clues” at the top of a sheet of paper. Underline it—twice, if you like. Write all of your weaknesses on this sheet of paper, and stick it in a place where you will see it often. What messages are hidden in these clues? What are they trying to tell you? What are they pointing you towards? What changes are they suggesting you make? How can you begin to work with these things, rather than struggle against them?

8

IT'S NOT MAGIC

CREATIVITY IS ORDINARY

Creativity is not magic. Say that aloud, and then say it again. There is an ever-growing list of people who will tell you that the opposite is true—that creativity *is* magic, one hundred percent. Pure and simple.

In recent years all kinds of artists, from legendary musicians to best-selling authors, have told us that creativity *is* magic. They state this as if it's an immutable truth. I can promise you, it's most definitely not.

Creativity is something that is innate to us as human beings. We are creative each and every day, whether we feel like we are actually creating something or not. Every time we solve a problem, whistle a tune in the shower, or even tell a little white lie, we are being creative.

To say that creativity is magic implies it's supernatural or enchanted in some way. It isn't. In fact, creativity is the opposite of magic. Creativity is natural, ordinary, and routine. Creativity is hard work. It's sit at your desk and scribble and write and get everything out work.

There is no magic in churning out logo design after logo design for peanuts. There is no magic in shooting back-to-back weddings every weekend of a beautiful summer. There is no magic in not sleeping for a week while you make the final (final!!!) revisions to your manuscript.

Creativity is not some mysterious force—it is completely rational. Creativity is ingrained in our reality, and all of us are creative by default. We create from the very first time we pick up a crayon and scribble our mark.

Creativity can *look* like magic, though, especially in the hands of our heroes. The artists, musicians, and writers we love so often appear to be the wielders of secret spells. It's hard to imagine that some of our favourite artworks, songs, and books are simply the result of one person turning up and putting in hard work, day after day.

The results of our heroes' creativity, and our own, can make it seem like magic must have been involved in the creation. But it is never magic, it is always work.

CREATIVITY IS NOT MAGIC

creativity

/ˌkriːtɪˈvəti/

~~noun~~ **VERB!**

The use of skill and imagination to
produce either something new or art.

CREATIVITY IS WORK

No matter what the dictionary tells you, creativity is not a noun. Creativity is a verb, it's a doing word. You can see this for yourself any time you actually try to be creative. You will have ten times as many ideas if you sit down and actually try to have ideas, rather than sit around waiting for an idea to pop into your head by magic.

In art school, one of the things we were told at the start of each project was to get down as many ideas as we could. As soon as we were given the brief, we were encouraged to scribble down every idea that came into our heads, and to keep going until we were empty. We were then told to throw away the first five pages, because the ideas we had poured onto them would be useless.

The more times I did this at the start of a project, the more it began to feel like a ridiculous exercise to me. I grew more and more perplexed and annoyed with this practice of throwing away five pages of my ideas, and became increasingly more skeptical of the people being paid to tell me to throw them away in the first place.

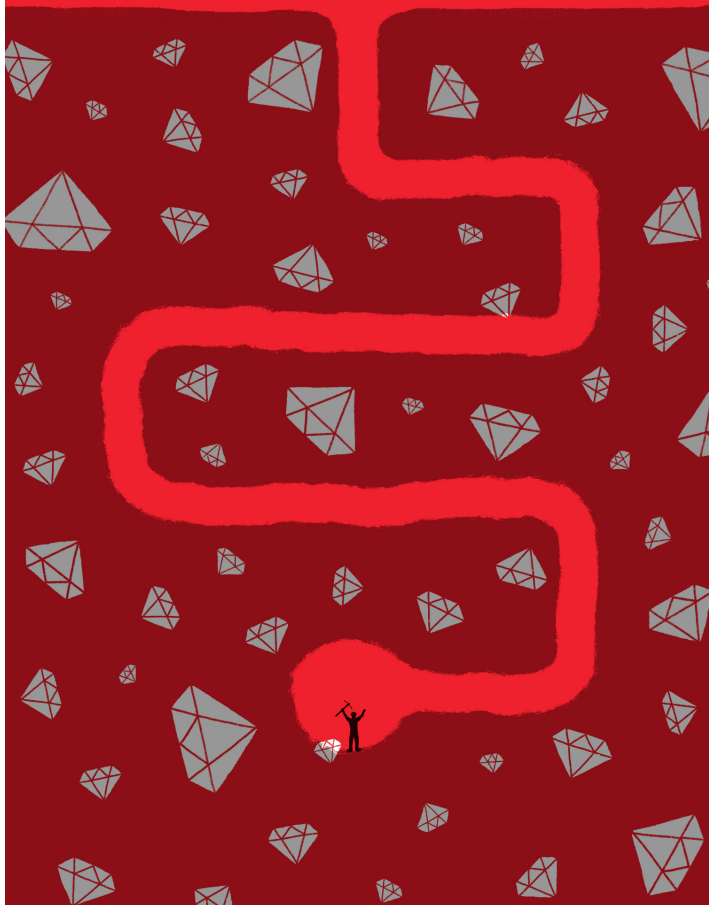
No matter what the project was, my best ideas always seemed to be on those first five “useless” pages. Almost without fail, the core idea I eventually used was doodled on a piece of paper I had previously thrown in the trash.

Around the time I decided to stop throwing away those pages of ideas I realized the actual point of the exercise, for me at least. It was to help reframe the way I thought about creativity and ideas altogether. Even if I invented or imagined that as the point of the exercise, it was a valuable lesson for me that I would like to pass onto you.

If you throw away five pages of ideas on each project, you will definitely throw away some good ones, probably even some great ones. But you can and will always have more—and, more than that, your best ideas will tend to stick with you, even if you try your hardest to lose them.

**YOUR IDEAS ARE ALWAYS A RESULT OF WORK AND
PROCESS—THEY ARE NOT A PRECIOUS AND FINITE
RESOURCE.**

THE IDEA MINE



ALL OF OUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED. WE CANNOT AFFORD TO BE IDLE. TO ACT ON A BAD IDEA IS BETTER THAN TO NOT ACT AT ALL BECAUSE THE WORTH OF AN IDEA NEVER BECOMES APPARENT UNTIL YOU DO IT. SOMETIMES THIS IDEA CAN BE THE SMALLEST THING IN THE WORLD. A LITTLE FLAME THAT YOU HUNCH OVER AND CUP WITH YOUR HAND AND PRAY WILL NOT BE EXTINGUISHED BY ALL THE STORM THAT HOWLS ABOUT IT. IF YOU CAN HOLD ON TO THAT FLAME, GREAT THINGS CAN BE CONSTRUCTED AROUND IT; THINGS THAT ARE MASSIVE AND POWERFUL AND WORLD CHANGING. ALL HELD UP BY THE TINIEST IDEAS.

– NICK CAVE, *20,000 DAYS ON EARTH*



THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

Just as creativity is not magic, ideas are not mystical and elusive things. Specific ideas are not floating around the universe, desperately trying to find a willing host, as some people would like you to believe.

There *are* things out there, floating around the universe. But they are not ideas at all, those things are just tiny sparks and signals. They are merely catalysts for ideas, not ideas themselves. An idea cannot be missed by you, then caught and used by someone else. Without you that idea would never exist in the first place.

Ideas are internal, rather than external. They already exist within you in their raw state, their ore. You dig those ideas out, polish them up, and turn them into something wonderful through absorbing and interpreting the world around you—by filtering and distilling your experiences.

**YOUR IDEAS WILL BE AS UNIQUE AS YOUR FINGERPRINT.
THE SECRET INGREDIENT IS NOT MAGIC, IT'S YOU.**

**IDEAS
DON'T
CHOOSE
YOU**

**YOU
CHOOSE
THEM**



THE PENCIL IS MIGHTIER
THAN THE WAND

CREATIVITY IS MAGICAL

Creativity may not be magic, but it definitely *is* magical. I know that sounds ridiculous, how can something that isn't magic be magical? There's a very subtle, and very real, difference between those two words.

Magic refers to something that literally *is* magic, some kind of spell or ritual. Some words you can chant to conjure up your desires out of thin air. Magical has a more abstract meaning, the feeling that something *seems* supernatural, something that *appears* to use magic.

As magical as it can *feel* to read through (some of!) the reviews of your newly published book, the book itself was created through work alone, not magic.

Thinking of creativity as magic appeals to us because it eliminates any effort on our part. It takes the burden of responsibility away from us entirely. The path of least resistance has been a recurring theme throughout this book, and magic would be that path. It would offer us the biggest reward for the least amount of effort.

Creativity does often feel like magic though, as if exactly the right idea has hit us at exactly the right time, out of nowhere. Those eureka moments that strike when we're walking the dog, or waiting in line, or sitting on the toilet.

The reason these seemingly random moments feel like magic is because they tend to happen in unexpected situations, and most often when we're not working. But they almost certainly always happen when we already *have* been working, when we're in some kind of flow. Even those eureka moments are a direct result of our efforts, and the power of our subconscious mind. The more work we put into thinking creatively and being creative, the more creativity will come naturally to us.

Our brain begins to tick away in the background; we start working on things without actively thinking about them. Our subconscious starts to look for signals, make connections, and push ideas to the front of our mind. The more work we put into having ideas, the more ready we are for the work of turning those ideas into things.

It's the actual doing of all that work which separates the people who create magical things—creative heroes like Maya Angelou or Nick Cave—from the people who wait for their ideas to magically find them.

Sometimes we do need to believe in things that are not real, or even true, though. These things can give us faith that there is something greater than ourselves, and a

desire to fulfil our true potential. But it's important that we don't forget about truth and reality altogether.

It's important that we don't ever confuse doing what we love with *just* doing what we love. That we don't confuse faking it with making it. That we don't confuse the magical nature of creativity with magic itself.

No matter what we believe in, ideas don't find us, they are already inside us. They don't choose us, we choose them. No matter what we believe in, our creativity and ideas thrive on work and process. No matter what we believe in, creativity is not magic. It *is* magical.

**YOU CAN
CREATE TRULY
MAGICAL
THINGS WITH
NO MAGIC AT
ALL**

YOU'RE NOT A WIZARD, HARRY

Although creativity can often feel like magic, it's not. It's always work. Ideas are never given to you by the universe, they come from inside you. You are the only one who can coax your ideas into existence and shape them into magical things. All of your creativity, and ideas, and artworks are a result of your efforts, and time, and a whole lot more. Although you may feel like a powerful wizard, you are not magic. You *are* magical.

ASSIGNMENT

WALKING OR WORKING?

Spend thirty minutes outside today—either running errands or just walking—and see if any ideas hit you, by magic. Don't actively think about these ideas, think about anything else. Just walk. When you get home spend thirty minutes *trying* to have ideas. Tomorrow morning, do the opposite. Spend thirty minutes trying to have ideas, then thirty minutes outside. Did you notice a difference? Which method gave you the best results?

9

**NOBODY KNOWS WHAT
THEY'RE DOING**

THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW
OR NOBODY TOLD ME

- THERE IS A LOT OF EMAIL
- ROUTINE IS ~~IMPOSSIBLE~~
OVERRATED
- IT WILL ALWAYS TAKE
LONGER THAN YOU THINK
- ART DIRECTORS CHANGE
JOBS (A LOT)
- TAKE A BREAK / BREATH
- TRACK YOUR EXPENSES
- KILL FEES ARE A THING
- 90% OF YOUR GOOD OPPS
WILL NOT WORK OUT
- 90% OF YOUR GOOD IDEAS

NO REALLY, IT'S TRUE!

The idea to write this book began with a list of all the helpful things I thought nobody else would tell you. “I don’t know what I’m doing” was on that list, but it’s actually the one thing that all kinds of artists and creative people will be all too eager to tell you.

You have probably seen it yourself countless times, most often looking like a kind of humblebrag: I don’t know what I’m doing, but please watch my TV show. I don’t know what I’m doing, but look at this project I just finished for that huge brand you love, or in my case:

I DON’T KNOW WHAT I’M DOING, BUT THANK YOU FOR BUYING MY SIXTH BOOK.

I realize how hard it can be to believe me (or anyone else) when I say “I don’t know what I’m doing.” You are holding an actual printed book that I wrote, with a major publisher’s logo on the spine, and my name is on the front cover...Can I really not know what I’m doing?!

I honestly don’t have a clue, I’m just doing it—and luckily it’s going okay. That’s the reason people like me say “I don’t know what I’m doing” aloud. We want you—person who doesn’t know what they’re doing—to know that we don’t either. Absolutely nobody at all has any real clue what they’re doing. They’re just doing it.

This may sound lame, but I used to dream about having a group of creative friends. I used to imagine how amazing it would be to constantly inspire and push each other. I used to imagine we would bounce ideas around and collaborate on amazing art projects together, whenever we could. But what’s actually amazing about having a group of creative friends is the constant reminders that you are not the only one who has no idea.

The relief that comes from knowing that nobody else knows what they’re doing either, especially your peers, is incredible. Nobody knows how to do their tax return properly, what to quote for that type of job, or if exposure is ever a worthwhile form of payment (it’s not, fyi).

ALL I EVER REALLY WANT TO KNOW IS HOW OTHER PEOPLE

**ARE MAKING IT THROUGH
LIFE. WHERE DO THEY PUT
THEIR BODY, HOUR BY HOUR,
AND HOW DO THEY COPE
INSIDE OF IT.**

– MIRANDA JULY, *IT CHOOSES YOU*



😊 I have no idea 😊

“I don’t know what I’m doing” is never a lie. In fact, to admit that you don’t know is the definition of honesty. It’s the equivalent of putting your hand up in class to ask a question—you are allowing yourself to be vulnerable.

It’s always true, even when the person saying “I don’t know what I’m doing!” is very successful or looks like they know exactly what they’re doing. In fact, it’s often the case that the more someone looks like they know exactly what they’re doing, the less they probably do.

There are two types of people who don’t know what they’re doing: those who don’t know what they’re doing and drive themselves crazy wondering how everyone else does it, and those who don’t know what they’re doing but continue to do something anyway.

There are also two types of people who *do* know what they’re doing: those people who are completely deluding themselves, and those who are simply deluded. Either way, everyone is basically winging it, to some extent.

EVERYONE IS A MESS.

**THAT’S ONE THING
THAT UNITES US.**

**WE’RE ALL FLAILING
AROUND, JUST TRYING
TO DO THINGS.**

**WE ALL FEEL LIKE WE
SHOULD BE DOING
MORE, OR BETTER.**

**SO WE PRETEND WE
KNOW WHAT WE'RE
DOING, AT LEAST.**

**BUT NONE OF US
ACTUALLY DO.**

YOU ARE NOT AN IMPOSTER

If you have ever felt like you don't know what you're doing, you have almost certainly experienced imposter syndrome too. For many creative people it's almost become our default state of existence. None of us know why we feel this way, but we are all anxiously waiting to be told that our turn is over. To pack up our paints, put down our camera, and step away from the laptop.

WE ARE ALL WAITING TO BE FOUND OUT ONE DAY. FOR WHOEVER IS IN CHARGE TO REALIZE WE HAVE BEEN MAKING IT ALL UP AS WE GO, THE WHOLE TIME.

The reasons for this are obvious when you think about it. As artists, and increasingly just as people, we are told things every day that make us feel like we *are* imposters. Also, everyone else looks like they know *exactly* what they're doing, and we are inclined to believe they do. We can never hear another person's inner critic, or see their anxious thoughts, or feel their self-doubt.

I spend most of my life feeling like an imposter. I never tell people what I do unless I absolutely have to, for example. I worry that saying the word "author" aloud, six published books into my career, will break some kind of magic spell—and if you have been paying attention, you will remember that I don't even believe in magic.

Still, I have this strong and unshakeable feeling, that the moment I allow myself to say I write books for a living everything will begin to crumble and crash around me. I will look at those books on the shelf, and my name will start to fade from the covers, like Marty McFly's hand during the *Echantment Under the Sea Dance*.

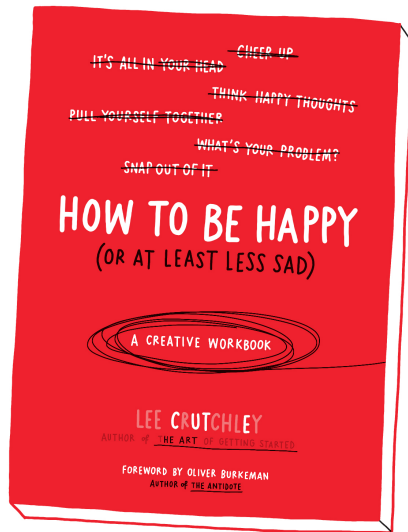
I know that a time will certainly come when I stop writing books for a living, whether it is through my own choices or more likely those of publishers and the people who buy my books (thank you!). But it won't happen as a result of someone realizing I'm an imposter and kicking me out of the secret author club—mainly because I don't even know how to join the secret author club.

I know from experience that whenever all this ends, it will probably be down to something else entirely, something I'm not expecting at all. That's how all this started in the first place, and that's how all this keeps going—"all this" being my whole career to date. It all started with me not knowing what I was doing, but doing it anyway.

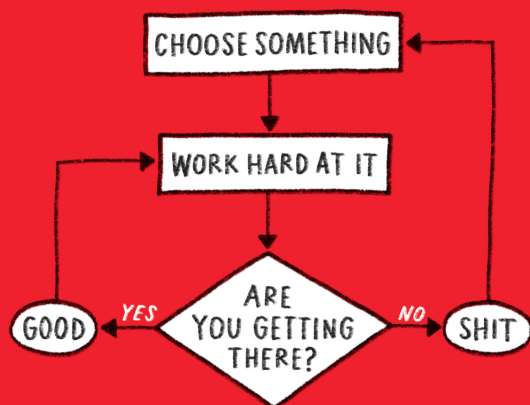
That's still how it works for me today. Every new book, starts with a kind of leap of faith. Each time I sit down to start a new project I'm faced with the reminder that I don't know what I'm doing, and I decide to do it anyway. I have to do it, even

when I don't know what it is. We all have to, the only other choice we have is to do nothing.

That's the main reason I want to tell you that nobody knows what they're doing. I want you to still do it anyway too, especially when you don't know what it is. I want you to keep doing it, despite not knowing what it is. I want you to feel okay—good even—about doing it, although you may never know. Because nobody else knows what we're doing either, we're all just doing it.



HOW LIFE WORKS



IT'S NOT A TRAP

I don't know how it works there—or anywhere else—now, but in my high school we had to choose our career path in our teens. We sat in a room with a careers advisor, and were essentially asked what we want to be when we grow up. We were at the age where enough people had told us we couldn't be a pro-footballer, or an astronaut, or a dinosaur that we accepted those things as facts.

After he had vetoed dinosaur, the advisor encouraged me to think about the things I was good at or enjoyed doing instead. For me it was art that best fit into both of those categories. So, when artist was also vetoed—apparently it wasn't a viable career option either—the advisor suggested I think about graphic design. Which was a “real job,” he said, that “pays incredibly well.”

After that meeting I went back to playing football in the playground. My sweater was on inside out, my shirt was untucked, and my tie was as short as it could possibly be without getting me in trouble. My hair was sticking both up and down, I was going to be a graphic designer.

CHOOSE SOMETHING AND DO IT

My graphic design jobs were never as artistic as I had hoped or imagined they would be, and they definitely did not pay “incredibly well.” A few years into my design career I began to feel ground down by work life, and life life, to be honest. I assumed it was probably that way for everyone, though, which seemed perfectly plausible.

I stuck with design for another few years, but I started to wonder about the path that thirteen-year-old me had chosen. The more I thought about that careers meeting, the more I noticed the similarities with throwing away the first five pages of my ideas. The meeting had another purpose, to show me that nobody is ever ready to make a decision about anything, but they still have to.

Unless we make a proactive choice, we can become overwhelmed by our indecision and inaction. The longer we go without actively making a decision, the harder it becomes to make one. We always have to choose something, even if we don't feel ready, even if we're afraid, and even if we don't know what we're doing.

Not too long after I had that realization, I made another choice. I quit my job, I sold all of my possessions, and I bought a ticket to travel around the world with a friend I'd met six months earlier. I wasn't sure if I was making the right decision. I didn't feel like I was ready. I had no real idea what I was doing, or why. I went to the pub.

That trip lasted a year, taking me through many different countries, and leading me to many more realizations. I began to see how I had unwittingly closed my mind, and my eyes, to opportunities and impulses that fell outside my chosen career. I had closed myself off to any deviations from that path, and to possible growth.

When I got back home to England I decided to start following all those impulses and desires I had been ignoring. I allowed myself to embrace uncertainty, and I decided to open myself up to new things. Especially the thought that I had no idea what I was doing, what I wanted, or where I was going. I had what felt like some kind of epiphany, albeit a relatively minor one.

IF YOU KNOW WITH 100% CERTAINTY WHAT YOU WANT TO DO IN LIFE, YOU ARE LIMITING YOURSELF TO ONLY THAT LIFE.

Having a rigid idea of where you want to be, and what you want to do, is incredibly restrictive. You will close yourself off to the countless other opportunities, and countless other lives, that can await you instead—if you are open to them.

IF YOUR PATH ONLY LEADS YOU TO A SINGLE DESTINATION, THAT'S THE ONLY PLACE YOU WILL EVER GO.

It's better to have goals that point in a rough direction, rather than along a carefully planned route. Sometimes you will end up a few miles from where you were hoping to be. Sometimes you will end up in a different place entirely. But by following a general direction, rather than a rigorously defined path, you open yourself up to so many more possibilities, and so many more lives.

**WHEN YOU ADMIT
THAT YOU DON'T
KNOW EXACTLY WHERE
YOU ARE GOING YOU
ALLOW YOURSELF TO
END UP EXACTLY
WHERE YOU ARE
SUPPOSED TO BE**

**THERE IS
ALMOST NO
SUCH THING AS
READY. THERE
IS ONLY NOW.
AND YOU MAY
AS WELL DO IT
NOW.**

**GENERALLY
SPEAKING NOW
IS AS GOOD A
TIME AS ANY.**

– HUGH LAURIE

YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW

Nobody knows what they're doing. Even if they look like they do, and especially if they think they do. They don't. Everyone is basically winging it. But you don't need to know, the important part is just that you do it, and that you keep doing it. Even when you're not ready to do it, and even if you're not actually sure what it is. You may never really know what you're doing, but nobody else does either.

ASSIGNMENT

ARE YOU SURE?

When was the last time you felt like you knew exactly what you were doing? When was the last time you had no idea what you were doing, but did it anyway? Which of those made you feel more anxious before you began? How did your feelings develop as you progressed? Did you become more or less anxious, more or less sure? Did both times end with the result you had imagined? Which of them would you prefer to experience again?

10

THE BIG SECRET

DON'T TAKE MY WORD FOR IT

This is what you've been waiting for. The most important part of this book, the big secret. This secret is the one thing you should hold onto as you continue your creative career. No matter what stage of that career you are at right now, and no matter what kind of creative work you make. You should cling to this secret tightly, and look at it often. Drumroll please...

THE BIG SECRET IS: THE PERSON AT THE FRONT OF THE ROOM ISN'T AUTOMATICALLY RIGHT.

That's the shortest, snappiest, and best-sounding version I could come up with. That was my best shot at some kind of instafriendly aphorism. The longer version is: just because a person is teaching a class, or giving a TED talk, or their name is on the cover of this book, it doesn't automatically mean everything they say is right.

It doesn't mean everything they're saying will be helpful or relevant to you. It doesn't mean it's true, by default.

I know that doesn't sound like a big secret that everyone has been hiding from you this whole time. But when did you last hear an author, or a teacher, or a parent admit that just because they're giving you advice it doesn't mean that advice is automatically right?

The people offering us this advice tend to think that it *is* useful and helpful, by default. They tend to think their advice *is* the right thing to do. That's largely because it's all based on things that *were* useful and helpful, to them.

People offering you advice obviously believe their advice is right and good, that they are helping you and offering useful directions. But no matter who is giving the advice, the advice that they give will always be theirs.

Advice always comes from the experiences and lessons a person has throughout their life. It will always be from their frame of reference alone. It's based on that person's hopes, dreams, and goals. It's a result of them walking down their own path, and sometimes getting lost.

**THE SECRET TO
LIFE IS THAT**

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE**Today**

Today you will read a book that possibly changes your life. It will affect you in ways you can't quite figure out. But, they're all good (definitely good). You are not normally the kind of person who writes reviews of books online. But this one? Wow! You have to give it 5 (FIVE!) stars.

Tomorrow

Don't bother reading this tomorrow. It's really

WHAT'S YOUR STAR SIGN?

Of course, I also believe my advice is helpful and offers good direction. But every piece of advice in this book—and every other book, talk, or class is just an opinion. This book is full of my opinions, specifically. It's twenty years or so of my experiences of working in different creative fields, distilled and spread across 256 pages.

Everything I have written in this book is something that I believe in deeply. They are all things I wish I had known at different stages in my career, and on different days throughout my life. They are all things I wish more people had told me, and things I wish more people told you. But they are all still my opinions, above all else.

Receiving advice is a lot like reading your horoscope. Some of the advice you're given will feel kind of general and vague, but like it could possibly apply to you in some way. Some of it will feel so completely wrong that you have no idea where to start with how wrong it is. Some of it will feel so specifically applicable to you, and your current situation, that it freaks you out completely.

This book is no exception. Everything I have written has been true for me. I'm sure some of it will be true for you, too, and I'm sure some of it won't. I'm also sure that none of it will be true for some people, who probably stopped reading a long time ago anyway.

I believe this book can help you to live a more creative life, and help you spend more time creating your art rather than doubting it. I hope this book can even help you to live a better life in general. But that doesn't mean what I am saying *is* helpful, by default. Just because I'm giving this advice, I'm still not automatically right.

If you *are* one those people who believes that creativity *is* magic, or you have never compared yourself to other artists, or you are simply coasting through life by *just* doing what you love, that is incredible and amazing.

Please ignore every single thing I have said, and continue to live out that wonderful life. Actually, don't ignore *everything* I've said. That's not my point at all.

**MY POINT IS, JUST BECAUSE
SOMEONE HAS A BLUE TICK ON
THEIR PROFILE, OR THEIR
NAME IS ON THIS BOOK, OR
THEY'RE THE PRESIDENT, YOU
SHOULD NEVER ASSUME THEY
ARE RIGHT**

**NO MATTER
WHAT THEY
TELL YOU, YOU
DON'T HAVE TO
STAY WITHIN
THE LINES**

– MR MAGORIUM'S WONDER EMPORIUM

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

The further we slip down the post-truth rabbit hole into the world of fake news, the more desperate we are to hear from honest and authentic voices. We are increasingly seeking out advice and opinions from people, brands, and organizations we believe we can trust.

The same big secret applies to those people, though. Just because someone is speaking in an honest and authentic voice it doesn't mean that they're automatically right. It doesn't even mean they're telling you the truth. Like everything, authenticity has become a sales tool, and we have to be ever vigilant about the voices we trust.

Everyone from likeable indie brands to evil Russian bots are trying to sell their products with authenticity, and varying degrees of decency. There's obviously no comparison to be made between a small brand trying to sell you handmade jeans and an evil Russian bot trying to sell you a polarizing opinion. But it does help to illustrate the point, authenticity sucks us in and sells things to us very effectively—even when it's fake.

None of this is meant to discredit any of the advice givers, or even any of the advice they give. It's incredible that we're able to seek advice, direction, education, and inspiration from an ever-growing number of amazing artists—and often even from our creative heroes.

It's a huge privilege that we can access this advice and direction so easily. It's an even bigger privilege to be able to write this book, full of my own advice.

However, too much advice, especially the advice we pay for, is sold to us as an absolute. As if the world is black and white, with no gray areas. As if there are definitive rules that guarantee success. As if there is a simple master plan we can all follow to achieve our wildest dreams.

But, no matter how much we may wish otherwise, we don't live in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. We'll never find a golden ticket. We'll never be given everything we have ever wanted (and a lifetime supply of chocolate) for simply completing the tour and obeying the rules.

G*i***v****e** **Y****o****u****R** *self*

@ **B****r****e****A****k**

FINDING THE GOLD

As with all the other chapters of this book, the real big secret is you. *You* have to choose the advice that is relevant to, and right for, you. That could be every single word of a book, or a single sentence. It could be advice from your best friend, or your mortal enemy, which is another good example of the big secret that's too often forgotten. Someone you like isn't automatically right, and someone you dislike isn't automatically wrong.

SMART AND GOOD PEOPLE SOMETIMES SAY THINGS WHICH ARE DUMB AND SHITTY.

DUMB AND SHITTY PEOPLE SOMETIMES SAY THINGS WHICH ARE SMART AND GOOD.

Either way, *you* are the one who has to use their advice. I could have written a whole book of specific vocational advice for a career in art and design, based on my experiences. I could have written all about my specific career path, from the first doodle to writing this word. But most of it is already irrelevant to me, never mind you.

We live in a different world than the one in which I posted my first drawing to tumblr, and we live in a different world than the one in which my first book was published—we even live in a different world than the one in which my last book was published. If recent history is anything to go by, we are probably already living in a different world than the one in which this book was published.

Every piece of advice you are given is valid, but it's not automatically useful or relevant to you. You have to resist the urge to be a bucket, filling yourself up with everything that's offered to you. Instead, you have to sift through this advice carefully, only holding on to the parts that speak to you directly. Those tiny nuggets of gold.

No matter how much help or advice you are given, you will still have to make all of the decisions and do all of the work yourself. No matter how much help or advice you are given, you still have to take your first step alone. No matter how much help or advice you are given, it will be up to you to start walking.

**IT'S REALLY
IMPORTANT,
ESPECIALLY IF
SOMEONE'S ON
CAMERA, OR
SOMEONE'S
WEARING A
SUIT, OR
SOMEONE'S
MAKING JOKES,
OR SOMEONE'S
IN A MAGAZINE**

...

**DON'T FUCKING
BELIEVE A
WORD THEY
SAY.**

– MIKE MILLS, *BEAUTIFUL LOSERS*

THERE ARE NO BIG SECRETS

Just because someone's famous, or they're giving a TED talk, or they wrote this book, it doesn't automatically make them right. They don't know any big secrets, even if they say they do. Their advice is still just an opinion dressed in a fancy suit. You have to decide which parts of any advice you're given are right for you. You have to decide how to implement that advice, and you have to act on it. The big secret isn't a secret at all, it's you.

ASSIGNMENT

NOT RIGHT IS NOT WRONG

What's the best piece of advice you were ever given? Look at it through an imaginary microscope, so you can see every tiny atom of it. What made this advice so good? Was it about you, someone else, or people in general? Was it from someone impartial, or someone close to you? Was it vague and inspirational, or direct and actionable? Now do the opposite. What was the worst piece of advice you were ever given, and what made it so bad?

SO, WHAT NEXT?

I finished writing this book during a worldwide pandemic. I had hoped to wrap things up neatly for you on these final few pages. I thought I would try to offer a succinct summary, maybe even a 10-point plan you could tear out and stick above your desk. Obviously, that is not never going to happen, and it never was.

It's not because I don't want to, I do. I want you to go away from this book feeling better about your creative practice. I want you to feel inspired, or fired up, or even just relieved. But I have no idea which parts of the book, if any, will have done that for you. I have even less of an idea about which parts will be relevant for the world.

Advice is flawed by its very nature, because advice can only ever come from our experiences. Even if advice *is* true it's *not* fact. When giving advice we take the things we have learned, things that helped us, and we polish them up. We paraphrase years of life and pass that on to someone else. We do this in the hope that the things we have learned can help other people, maybe even you.

It's those flaws that make advice so valuable. Advice is born out of vulnerability. It's formed and refined through hard work, and mistakes, and time. It comes from people asking dumb questions when everyone else is too afraid to put their hands up. Advice comes from people trying and failing miserably, then trying again anyway.

Advice can also do more harm than good. Phrases like Do What You Love and Good Vibes Only don't seem that dangerous, but they are. This type of advice is often screamed the loudest, by people who believe it really was that easy for them, and are sure it will be that easy for you. This causes the rest of us, the people who this doesn't work for, to feel like failures and blame ourselves.

So you have to take advice with a pinch, or a mountain, of salt. Advice will always have an agenda. Sometimes that agenda is simply to help you, as I hope this book will. But often, that agenda is to get you to buy into something, whether that's an opinion or a system. The agenda is generally to make you drink the Kool-Aid.

No matter what you are told, or sold, there are no secret routines you can follow to become instantly productive. There are no affirmations or aphorisms you can repeat in the mirror each morning to magically conjure up success. There are not ten easy steps to happiness. That's the reason that hundreds, if not thousands, of books like this one are still published every year.

If secrets and lifehacks for productivity and success did exist, then this book and so

many others would not. If they existed, those routines and secrets that actually worked would have been passed down through the ages. Every one of us would be fitter, happier, more productive. Comfortable. Not drinking too much. But we're not.

I wrote this book primarily for creative people. For the artists, and designers, and photographers. I also wrote it for the phone call doodlers and sandcastle builders and people who sing in the shower. I really do believe we are all creative in some way, even if we don't know it. I genuinely do believe that living itself is a creative act.

So, while most of the advice I have given in this book is about creativity and a career as an artist, I also believe most of the core principles behind everything I've said can be applied to our general non-artistic lives.

I also believe that people who aren't artists compare themselves to others too often. I also believe that people who don't consider themselves to be creative should seek out failure. I believe that the real and lasting changes we all make in life are small and incremental.

I believe that despite all of the advice, help, and direction you receive through life, all you will ever have is yourself. You will decide which pieces of advice are relevant and helpful to you. You will choose your own definitions of success and failure. You will ultimately walk down your own path, and climb your own mountains.

EVENTUALLY, YOU WILL FIGURE OUT ALL THE IMPORTANT AND INSPIRING THINGS THAT NOBODY ELSE WOULD TELL YOU.



I WANT TO THANK

My editor, Joel Fotinos, for believing in this book (and me). Gwen, and everyone else at St Martin's Essentials, for making me feel like I know what I'm doing. My agent, Laurie Abkemeier, for always telling me things nobody else would. My wife, Jayne, for helping me believe that I had something worth saying. And you, for listening.

**BUT,
I'M DOING
OKAY**

ALSO BY [LEE CRUTCHLEY](#)

GET LOST!

THE NOCTURNAL JOURNAL

HOW TO BE HAPPY (OR AT LEAST LESS SAD)

THE ART OF GETTING STARTED

QUOTESKINE VOLUME 1

ABOUT ME THE AUTHOR



[Lee Crutchley](#) is an artist and writer from a small town in England that nobody has heard of. He now lives in Berlin, where he mainly struggles to take his own advice. You can sign up for email updates [here](#).

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ALSO BY LEE CRUTCHLEY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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